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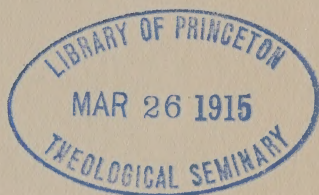
THE BARTERED BIRTHRIGHT

FORTY BRIEF EXPOSITORY ADDRESSES

ON THE

LIFE OF JACOB

For the Week=Days of Lent



BY THE

REV. F. A. D. LAUNT, D.D.

RECTOR OF ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA



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To
ORLANDO CREASE

PREFACE.

NOTHING ages so fast as a sermon. There is a steady, if limited, demand for new Lenten Readings, modern and moderate in tone and at the same time loyal to the Scriptures and Creeds of the Church.

I have tried to make these addresses interesting to a week-day congregation. For this, in many instances, style, method, and personal preference have been sacrificed; something, it may be, of the dignity of a former generation; nothing, I trust, of doctrinal soundness or of spiritual earnestness and wisdom. The story helps, although each address is complete in itself. I have used the commentaries, ancient and modern, and several monographs on the narrative.¹ Some verses not otherwise credited are by Archbishop Alexander.

During the past fall and winter a number of typewritten copies of these addresses have been read to Sunday congregations by students in two of our theological seminaries and the approval of these young men probably has had its influence with my publishers, as it has been an encouragement to me, in giving them a more permanent form.

I hope that lay-readers may find the book serviceable

¹ Indebtedness is acknowledged to four books by eminent English authors: *Isaac and Jacob*, George Rawlinson, M.A.; *The Hebrew Twins*, Samuel Cox, D.D.; *Israel, A Prince of God*, F. B. Meyer, B.A.; *The Book of Genesis*, Marcus Dods, D.D. For suggestions on the wrestling at Peniel I owe thanks for a sermon by each of two distinguished American preachers, the Rev. Charles S. Olmsted, D.D., and the Rev. Edwin B. Coe, D.D.

for other seasons as well as for Lent. A friend has suggested that these expositions might be useful in parish and Sunday-school libraries. I have only to add that instead of finding the Scripture narrative too slight for my purpose there has been difficulty in covering the ground and that the chapters are specially helpful for Lenten study, as may be seen from a glance at the titles of the addresses, particularly of those for Holy Week.

PHILADELPHIA,

Thanksgiving Day, 1900.

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THE BARTERED BIRTHRIGHT

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THE BEGINNING.

ASH WEDNESDAY.

“His hand took hold on Esau’s heel; and his name was called Jacob.”
—Gen. xxv. 26.

IN the journal of that most human ecclesiastic, Dean Swift, we find the following entry: “Lent has come again, and I hate Lent. I hate furmity and sour, devout faces.” And he is quoted as saying: “But I suppose that for most of us there is, during the Lenten season, a breath of God upon the air, an influence of which we cannot wholly rid ourselves, and alas, the inmost reflection in our hearts from time to time is that Lent is a bore.”

In the twentieth century our Lenten dinners are seldom limited to the old London dishes of “furmity” or “herb porridge,” and we have learned that “sour faces” are not signs of growth in the Gospel graces of faith, hope, and charity. Nevertheless there are many who still hate Lent, and more, it may be, whose inmost reflection is that “Lent is a bore.” There are those to whom the holy season, which they observe merely out of respect for fashion or custom, means the temporary suspension of the worldly gaieties upon which their hearts are fixed. There are others who hear in the Ash Wed-

nesday church bell the unwelcome voice of conscience; they are reminded of resolutions formed in the months gone by that with the coming Lent they would turn over a new leaf. The habits, thoughts, negligences, companionships, which were sapping the spiritual life would in Lent, they had promised themselves, be renounced. Now the day is at hand, it will not wait, and the effort to break away from the evil thing disquiets them; they groan in spirit as they strive to force the feeble will into prompt and resolute action. But it is to be hoped that the great majority of those who will keep Lent realize that a breath of God is on the air, and welcome the retirement, the multiplied services, the inspiration of the hearty companionship of a multitude throughout the world who at this time endeavor to strengthen character and purify and sweeten the innermost springs of the spiritual life. To many such, however, there is some inward dissatisfaction in the thought that there is likely to be a tedious reiteration in the themes of the meditations and exhortations presented at this season. The best Lenten books and the best Lenten sermons seem to them to follow well-beaten lines. To take up once more during the earlier weeks of Lent the temptations and the sins of the appetites of the body, and the physical sufferings of Christ in the closing weeks, has a suggestion of triteness rather than of enlivening interest, and while they would not venture, perhaps, to speak of the discussion of these subjects "as a bore," it does seem unattractive, somehow, from its very familiarity, and they have a feeling that there is room for other, if not more vital, themes.

For those who have kept many Lents a fresh line of religious study may be acceptable. For beginners it may

be an encouragement to go on next year to more abstract and doctrinal subjects. And so this Lent you are invited to read with me the struggle which one human soul made to be true to himself and to his God—to trace out the steps by which Jacob, the Heel-catcher, the Supplanter, became Israel, the Prince of God.

In connection with these brief, practical, week-day addresses upon this most eventful, romantic, chequered, and helpful human life, you are earnestly exhorted to hear and heed the sermons preached in church on the Sundays of Lent. In the time allowed for a sermon your rector will have opportunity to bring before you the deeper devotional and doctrinal aspects of this portion of the Christian year in a style and method more becoming to the greater solemnities of public worship on the Lord's Day.

(Should these printed pages be read by any parishioner whose clergyman uses some other course of week-day readings, that parishioner must not make the private reading of this book an excuse for neglecting the week-day services of the parish church. Unless these pages are an inspiration to increased faithfulness in Christian duty they will be written and read in vain.)

We have said that Jacob's history is interesting. Every life-story has its fascination. "Biography," said Carlyle, "is the most universally pleasant and profitable of all reading." The biography of one who was great and good is a help, incentive, and guide for all who would be true to God and to the highest ideals of mankind. In every true life, if we get at the secret of it, we shall find that strong and beautiful character is wrought out and manifested

"In the struggle, not the prize;"

and that the refinement of mind, the elevation of thought, the tenacity of purpose, the tenderness of affection, the strength of will, which result from a life of energetic and well-directed effort to serve God and man, are in themselves the best and most satisfactory rewards of that labor. A distinguished Scotch preacher (Dr. Candlish) said: "There is scarcely a mood of the mind into which sin or sorrow can cast a believer that may not find a type, or parallel, or example, in Jacob." His words are true. The narrative is of perennial interest. It is, moreover, especially suitable for Lenten reading. In Lent we hope to overcome some of our faults, to multiply our graces. Jacob trod that upward road and marked the way. No man in the Bible, unless it be St. Peter, started lower or climbed higher. It is also to be noted that while Jacob was born with the strongest inclinations towards evil, while he often yielded to those inclinations, he was never lured into the grosser forms of self-indulgence. His sins were of the heart and of the mind. Therefore, if Jacob speaks to believers by his sorrows, by his chastisements, by his aspirations, he speaks especially by his sins, for few of us are in danger of yielding to the coarser forms of vice; our sins, for the most part, are the sins of Jacob — sins of worldliness, of self-will, of presuming on the mercies of God.

The series of addresses which we have outlined will be chiefly expository. Now expositions of Holy Scripture are attractive to thoughtful people because they necessarily eliminate many of the undesirable features of modern religious discourse. The personality of the speaker, local, secular, or disputed subjects must retire into the background while the Holy Spirit Himself, in the words which He has inspired, is permitted to speak

His own blessed and edifying message. It is generally agreed that our lay-people should take more time in Lent for an intelligent and prayerful study of some portion of the sacred writings. We hear much of the dangers which threaten the Church from the researches and conjectures of the so-called "higher critics." As a matter of fact, the deadliest foe which threatens the Word of God to-day is not criticism, but neglect. It is the unopened Bible in Christian homes, *not* criticism, even the most radical and faithless criticism, which should awaken our fears. God will defend and keep His own. But its treasures are for those that seek them. Expository preaching is a reading of Scripture in the ears of the people, and it often leads them to open their Bibles when they reach home. It is, furthermore, the natural method of enforcing Divine truth. The chief purpose of preaching is to interpret Holy Scripture. Our Lord's first sermon was an exposition of a chapter from Isaiah, and on the day of His Resurrection "He expounded unto" the two disciples, on the way to Emmaus, "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." This method was used in the synagogues and was transferred to the early Church. Justin Martyr tells us that in the second century all preaching was expository. In the fourth century St. Chrysostom chided the people because they turned their eyes to a man who lighted lamps in the cathedral while he was expounding the Scriptures. Exposition is not the only way, nor the only good way of preaching the Gospel, but surely it should not be neglected. When this method is fairly employed the pews usually find relief in one particular, for it is with an isolated text and not with an exposition that the preacher finds it so "dangerously easy to glide into

exhortation when he should be rather exercising himself in explanation."

On this day of good resolutions let us think of one great fact in Jacob's history. When God chose Jacob to found a nation and institute a religious economy, He did not "find out a man with a ready-made virtue, and then reward him for it." On the contrary, he who deceived his father, cheated his brother, mastered destiny itself, and "from a shelf the precious diadem stole and put it in his pocket," who vowed "the Lord shall be my God," and yet let his heart linger on the earth—such a man as this found it hard to learn to submit his will to the will of God. That was the secret of all Jacob's failures and sorrows. Is it not so with us? Said St. Augustine: "The carnal man rises from his worldliness and becomes divine when in all things he prefers God's will to his own." To-day let us resolve to make a complete surrender and say from the heart, "Thy will, not mine, be done." "I have but one small thing—my will," writes a holy man. "Is it a great thing to surrender to Him who gives such great blessings to me, and who purchased me with His own most precious Blood?"

THE BROTHERS.

FIRST THURSDAY IN LENT.

“And the boys grew : and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field ; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison : but Rebekah loved Jacob.”—Gen. xxv. 27, 28.

IS the narrative before us a true story ? Is it history or is it merely folk-lore and old-world legend ? Of many answers take one. In this portion of the Bible we read of little or nothing which is beyond our own experience. Birth, dreams, thoughts about God, marriage, joy, sorrow, doubt, death, burial are among the facts, and not the legends of the race. The characters in the story are not grotesque nor superhuman, neither entirely good nor utterly bad ; and the scenes and incidents brought before us are in keeping with the civilization of the period designated. We must admit that these chapters, in their record of the feelings, speech, and behavior of the men and women whose history they relate, seem to give us a natural and credible story ; that at the same time their representation of the being and character of God is such that neither the intellect nor the moral sense is repelled by what is said concerning Him.

That portion of the history which we will consider during the days of Lent opens with the birth of Esau and Jacob. Subsequently, each received a new name to which a moral significance was attached, but when they were born the twins were given names suggested by the

act of one and the appearance of the other, Esau meaning " hairy " and Jacob " he who takes by the heel."

As a rule twins cherish a deep affection for each other and have similar tastes and dispositions, but the sons of Isaac and Rebekah soon exhibited as marked a contrast in head and heart as in outward appearance. From dawn to dusk Esau roamed over the hills and valleys in pursuit of the wild beasts of the field. He was the heir and thought himself entitled to a youth of pleasure. But Jacob, accepting the position of a younger son, gave his attention to the flocks and herds, the sowing and the reaping, and became a man of steady, industrious habits. Rebekah loved Jacob and knew that he was God's chosen, for an oracle from heaven had declared unto her, " The elder shall serve the younger." But Jacob was by nature crafty and ambitious, and unfortunately his mother, instead of correcting this disposition, stimulated it by frequently reminding him of the mysterious message from heaven. And so he grew up with high notions of the powers and privileges of the birthright of the family, firm in the belief that somehow he would be the future lord of the tribe and the inheritor of the promises, and ready to aid himself by any means within reach in the work of securing his rights and accomplishing the designs of Providence.

Jacob differed from Esau in at least three particulars. Jacob is the first man mentioned in the Bible who possessed marked intellectual strength; upon whom the gift of thought and expression was bestowed with a generosity which would have made him a distinguished man in any calling, in any age. He used that power to master men, and he mastered them. For many years he matched his keen mind against the mind of God and sought to

have his own way and win his own ends by outwitting his Maker. Now a strong man, a man who stands as a mountain peak amid surrounding hills, is always an interesting and fascinating study, for naturally we are all hero-worshippers. Furthermore, Heine's observation that the men of action are after all only the unconscious instruments of the men of thought is as profound as it is true. Brains rule the world. But the spiritual helpfulness of the story of Jacob's mental power is to be seen in the fact that while he was constantly tempted to use, and often did use, his intellect in the service of the senses—not grossly, for he was quite free from grossness in any of its forms—God constantly withstood him in the attempt. From first to last God wrestled with Jacob, for having begun a good work in the soul of His servant He would accomplish it unto the day of salvation.

There are two other qualities which also distinguished Jacob from his brother.

One was a high appreciation of the spiritual value of the birthright. He had the religious temperament. From earliest childhood he thought much of the mysteries of the strange world about him, of the stranger world within him. "Has the world an owner?" he would ask; "does it belong to my father Isaac? What makes the world go on, the sun rise and set, the seasons come and go? And the people, too, are they governed by laws, as the world seems to be? What of myself; must I leave this world; when, and whither?" And so as the sense of his own personality awakes he will think of the real Owner, Law-maker, and Governor of the world and of all its people. He will become conscious of a Presence outside himself, a Personality spoken of by his devout parents as God. Thoughtful youth readily attains to such convictions. It

sees that every natural longing has its natural satisfaction. If the body thirsts for water, its demand is amply provided for. If the heart craves affection, there are fellow-beings to receive and to return its devotion. If we thirst for life eternal, for love eternal, it is therefore reasonable to suppose that eternal life and eternal love will be given in answer to the cry for them. Yes, the human heart is naturally religious, naturally Christian. It is not satisfied with the earth. You give a bird food and drink and a safe and comfortable cage. You may think it satisfied with its life in the cage. Open the door, however, and you will see where its true home is when it soars forth into its native air. Unthoughtful Esau was seemingly content with the earth. Jacob longed to know God.

Again, Jacob was distinguished from his brother by his constancy, his persistent, unwavering constancy. Esau is "to one thing constant never." He acts upon impulse, and appetite or circumstances change his purpose from day to day. Inconstancy is "that one error" which "fills him with faults; makes him run through all the sins." Notwithstanding his guile, Jacob was great because he was constant. His mind was set on the birthright and year after year he schemed and watched, and, never wavering, won the prize. Rachel was the darling of his heart. For her he toiled in almost servile labor fourteen years and because of his great love the time seemed short. The constancy of Thackeray's Major Dobbin, over which we thrill and weep, is in Jacob. Rachel died by Jacob's side in her youth, but her image remained undimmed in his constant heart, and after what might be called a lifetime, when death came to him in the mansion of the great king of Egypt, his thoughts were of Rachel and her name was on his lips. Addison's

strong words concerning constancy will help us to recognize in Jacob's remarkable constancy a true greatness. "Without constancy," says the essayist, "there is neither love, friendship, nor virtue in the world."

In the Scripture before us there is a lesson for the young and for those who love them. Whittier has voiced this lesson,—

"We shape ourselves the joy or fear
Of which the coming life is made ;
And fill our future's atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade.
The tissue of the life to be
We weave with colors all our own ;
And in the fields of destiny
We reap as we have sown."

Or, more briefly, in Wordsworth's familiar line,

"The child is father of the man."

We have here also a lesson for our own home life. Isaac's home was undoubtedly the holiest and purest on the earth at that time. The Marriage Office holds it up as a model even for Christians, reminding us that Isaac and Rebekah lived faithfully together,—and yet there was discord in that home. There was in that home both want of thought and want of heart. In that home Esau became a profane man. Are we doing God service in our homes ? If we desire to do better and be better, here is work for Lent. We read that on the night of the Pass-over in Egypt "there was not a house where there was not one dead." In how many of our houses is there one dead in trespasses and sins ? Do those I live with take knowledge of me that I have been with Jesus ? Do they see

that my communions are making me more gentle and unselfish in act and speech ? “ Let them learn first to shew piety at home ” is a text for us all to ponder in our hearts.

THE BARTER.

FIRST FRIDAY IN LENT.

“And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint.”—Gen. xxv. 30.

THE portion of Jacob's life-story which will occupy our thoughts for some days to come is, in one of its aspects, a study in temptation. To each member of this household, the chosen family of God, the tempter comes. Next Sunday morning the Gospel in the Communion Office relates the temptation of Christ. That important event in His life naturally leads us to think of our own temptations and His example to us in our trials, His succor and His sympathy. During these early days in Lent we are therefore following the mind of the Church in taking up the subject of temptation.

1. Consider first the peculiar incident of the text. We read that “Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came from the field and he was faint.” Jacob was preparing his evening meal, a dish of pottage or porridge, composed of red lentils, a vegetable still in common use in the East. The savory odor of the pottage cooking on the fire guided Esau to the spot. He was coming home wearied from the hunt. We know not what unusual fatigues he had endured that day, or what daring adventures he had encountered with the wild beasts of the field, but when he reached his brother's side he threw himself down and demanded the instant satisfaction of his ravenous appetite, crying out, “Feed me with that red — that red.”

Jacob saw the hand of fate. For years he had been plotting and planning to secure his brother's birthright, and although it is scarcely possible that he had ever dreamed of such a chance as this, his keen mind at once recognized the opportunity. He knew his brother; he knew how slight a value Esau placed upon the spiritual heritage, and he knew the strength of Esau's appetites and impulses; and so, seizing the opportunity, he replied, " ' Sell me this day thy birthright.' On this condition only you shall have the pottage." " Behold," said the hungry man, " I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me ?" Here we have the language of exaggeration and unbelief. He was not starving or dying, he had strength to walk and speak, and in his father's house near by, or from the hand of any servant, he might in a few moments have had enough and to spare. And when he declared that his birthright could profit him nothing after he was dead he revealed his own want of faith in what was really the very heart of the Abrahamic promise. Esau is thus an idolater of the immediate, the real founder of the Epicurean school — " Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." His birthright is a vague vision of the future, while the pottage is a " bird in hand worth two in the bush."

But Jacob will not trust his brother's word: " Swear to me this day," he says; " we will make a bargain which cannot be broken." Thereupon the agreement was sealed with an oath. " So Esau sold his birthright unto Jacob." " Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils. And he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright."

2. What, then, let us now ask, was this birthright, and was Jacob justified in securing it as he did? In patri-

archal times the first-born succeeded his father as head of the family, inherited a double portion of his father's goods, and had the right to act as priest for the family and tribe. But the promise to Abraham declared, "In thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed," and therefore the birthright in the chosen family constituted its possessor the father, after the flesh, of the Messiah who was to come. From him should descend "the chief ruler," Christ, who should be "the first-born among many brethren," and "the first-begotten from the dead" and whose Church is called "the Church of the first-born."

Now Jacob believed this, believed, too, the revelation made to his mother, "the elder shall serve the younger," and he coveted the blessing. The narrative nowhere represents Jacob as a perfect man, and here we see him committing a sin which led him into other sins and embittered his whole life. We are, of course, disposed to view his conduct in the most favorable light possible. But we must frankly admit that he treated his brother unfairly and took advantage of his weakness. We must remember, however, that Jacob had neither the written Word, the Holy Spirit, nor the example of Christ, as we have; nevertheless he had a conscience and he must have known that this barter was wrong and faithless.

3. Take a third thought. Let us consider Esau's temptation and his fall. Esau was suddenly tempted to pay too dear a price for the gratification of an appetite of the body. So the tempter said to our Lord, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Our Saviour's real temptation in the suggestion here offered was that He should do His own will and make Himself independent of the Father's providential

support. Yet He had fasted long and was an hungered, and we know that He was tempted in all points like as we are, and surely, in some measure, He was tempted to pay too dear for bread to eat. Are we not all familiar, sorrowfully familiar, with this form of temptation? The natural desires of the body are sinless in themselves, for they were implanted by God, but the tempter comes and lures us to gratify these desires unlawfully, prematurely, instantly, and the price he asks is our birthright.

To-day let us take home two thoughts which grow out of what has been said upon the subject of temptation.

Those who are endeavoring to be consistent communicants of the Church and to grow in grace soon discover the two chief forms of temptation which beset them and the Christian method of dealing with such temptations. The first general form of temptation may be called a trial of faith. St. Peter in the first chapter of his first Epistle teaches us that we should "rejoice" under such "manifold temptations, that the trial of" our "faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The manifold temptations which are a trial of faith, the Apostle seems to say, must boldly be met and conquered by the help of God. He also tells us for our encouragement, that they are only "for a season," you will soon find relief; nor do they come to you without purpose, needlessly, for you are assaulted by them only "if need be." The storm of wind is good for the oak because it lengthens and strengthens the roots of the oak, making it more vigorous and able to withstand yet fiercer gales. So temptation met and overcome by the Christian increases his strength. The strength of the temptation, in

a real and true sense, has been added to the strength of the conqueror, has passed over into the soul of the victor. In fighting manfully to maintain our Christian name and calling it is our comfort to know that our Divine Helper is ever with us, offering us grace to continue the conflict. "Where wert Thou, Lord, while I was being tempted," exclaimed a saint of old. "Close by you, my son, all the while," was the tender reply. With all his mistakes, Mohammed was strong because of his unwavering faith in God as an ever-present help. When his trembling comrade cried in despair, "We are only two," he could confidently reply, "There is one other, there is God." Fénelon, the devout Christian believer, said, "The realization of God's presence is the one sovereign remedy against temptation."

Again, while some temptations must be faced and beaten down, there are temptations of another sort, temptations such as Esau's, temptations which must be fled from. Joseph fled and was saved. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Our Lord would have us turn away from the *entrance* of the tempter's palace of false delight. Especially should we flee from a temptation which lures us to yield to our besetting sin. As has been said, "If a man wears garments in which powder is wrought into the texture, he cannot safely go and hire out in a blacksmith's shop."

In Holy Scripture we are taught that Christians are not ignorant of the devices of the adversary of souls. Usually we do know whether a temptation is one which should be fought or fled from. If it is one we should flee from, we are lost if we dally with it. A prompt, resolute, courageous turning away is wisdom and safety. But how shall we have strength to act thus decisively and on the

instant ? Take one answer. Close your eyes and think of Christ upon the Cross. Then shall you have strength to turn away. For "God is faithful." He "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape."

THE BIRTHRIGHT.

FIRST SATURDAY IN LENT.

“Thus Esau despised his birthright.”—Gen. xxv., 34.

ESAU sold his birthright because he despised it. His appetite was stronger than his faith. For this reason he is called in the Epistle to the Hebrews a “profane person.” Self-indulgence and unbelief go together, and one leads to the other; and the motives which prompted Esau to make this senseless, wicked bargain are still doing their evil work in the world.

1. Birthrights are sold every day “for one morsel of meat.” Esau is the type of thousands who barter away baptismal grace for some desire of the flesh. To make this foolish exchange is a temptation which beguiles the young especially. Youth should be guarded with all diligence because the penalty visited upon such barter is always severe, sometimes it seems terribly, even unjustly severe. On every hand may be found those who suffer through the years on account of one moment of lack of self-control in the days of youth. Yet when we consider, we are forced to admit that in the nature of things such consequences are inevitable. The first bloom of purity and innocence, for instance, is a birthright which once lost is lost forever. Brush the bloom from the peach or the plum, and the peach remains and the plum remains, but the bloom is gone forever. It never comes a second time. It is so with the soul. The consequences of some sins remain. Some things once lost are lost forever.

And so the wise man's exhortation, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," should be impressed upon the young. The heart is the source and centre of the life of the body. When it is diseased, the life falters; when it ceases, death ensues. In the spiritual use of the word the heart signifies that which is precious and necessary to the on-flowing of life. Therefore the heart must be kept with all diligence. The birthright of a pure, clean heart, a heart open to the influences of Divine grace, Satan covets and offers for it "one morsel of meat." And still the foolish bargain allures, seems a good bargain to the eager appetite. To all, some time, in some way, the adversary draws nigh, as he came to hungry Esau, as he came to the fasting Christ, saying, "All this indulgence, all this earthly pleasure or treasure will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down but for a moment and worship me."

2. Notice, too, that Esau's sin, like most acts of a similar character, was at once the impulse of the moment and the result of tendencies which had long been growing in him. A flash of lightning seems a sudden thing. In reality the lightning flash is only made possible by atmospheric conditions and stores of electricity which have been gathering for some time. This helps to explain why an entire earthly career, possibly an eternal future, may turn upon the act of a moment. Criminals in our State prisons often tell those to whom they open their hearts that they were surprised into crime; almost before they knew it the guilty deed was done. If they had been given time for reflection, they say, they would have overcome the impulse which ruined them. But in all such cases evil desires and tempers must have been nourished in the heart for months and years; when they were full

grown some unexpected chance slipped the leash on them and they passed beyond control. When we yield to a sinful impulse, behind that act of the moment, there is, we may be sure, a history. Character has been defined as the sum of all our acts; and what any one of us would do in any sudden storm of passion, in any instantaneous and deadly peril, would probably depend upon our character—upon what we already are. Esau's past thoughts and acts had made him the man he was. His present behavior was only the harvest of what he had sown in the waiting furrows of the past.

3. Again, Esau was not a profane man because he sold his birthright, but he sold his birthright because he was a profane man. He is here the representative of many a man who was baptized in infancy, grew up in a Christian home, and from early childhood was made familiar with churchly teaching, who notwithstanding this precious birthright has become a man of the world; a frank, strong, generous, attractive man, it may be, but yet a man of the world; a man who receives and accepts God's most coveted gifts while he neglects and forgets the Giver. We hesitate to call such cultivated, successful, and pleasant men profane. If they seem to lead moral lives and speak respectfully of religion, we hope for the best. But if we look closely into such lives we shall see that both towards God and men they are selfish. A man of this kind often smilingly requires his family and his friends to bend to his will and minister to his comfort, his pleasure, or his pride. To do his will is the price of his esteem. Even his unselfish deeds are acts of expiation into which he is shamed by the love of others, or his self-love is gratified by placing others in his debt. To real self-denial he is a stranger. The very first lesson in

Christianity he knows not; and he has it not in him to desire to be like Christ,—who did not His own will, but gave Himself for others. It is a pitiful thing to see these strong, generous, attractive, prosperous men who are without God in the world. How we shrink from warning such men! Is it never a duty, your duty and mine, at some God-given opportunity, to tell such men, face to face, honestly and frankly, of their awful danger?

4. Again, Esau was profane because he did not believe in his birthright. He thought it would not profit him then or after he died. There are many to-day in the same unbelief. They do not see the value or necessity of religion either for this life or for that which possibly may follow. Such unbelief is a great sin because it shows that the man has no inward sense of a guilt which needs pardon, no ideals which can uplift. Surely, too, neglect of God, neglect of His choicest gifts, must wound the heart of a loving Father. Such sin is a grieving of the Spirit of God. From those who so sin we may ask a hearing, if not for ourselves, yet for one who was great and wise and not disposed to be credulous. James Russell Lowell, in an after-dinner speech before a company of educated and prosperous men, many of whom were faithless, said: "I fear that when we indulge ourselves in the amusement of going without a religion, we are not, perhaps, aware how much we are sustained at present by an enormous mass, all about us, of religious feeling and religious conviction; so that, whatever it may be safe for us to think, for us who have had great advantages, and have been brought up in such a way that a certain moral direction has been given to our character, I do not know what would become of the less favored classes of mankind if they undertook to play the same game. Whatever

defects and imperfections may attach to a few points of a doctrinal system which proclaims a crucified and risen Christ, it is infinitely preferable to any form of polite and polished skepticism which gathers as its votaries the degenerate sons of heroic ancestors, who having been trained in a society and educated in schools, the foundations of which were laid by men of faith and piety, now turn and kick down the ladder by which they have climbed up, and persuade men to live without God, and leave them to die without hope. The worst kind of religion is no religion at all, but these men living in ease and luxury, indulging themselves in the amusement of going without a religion, may be thankful that they live in lands where the Gospel which they neglect has tamed the beastliness and ferocity of the men who, but for Christianity, might long ago have eaten their carcasses like the South Sea Islanders, or cut off their heads and tanned their hides like the monsters of the French Revolution. When the microscopic search of skepticism which has hunted the heavens and sounded the seas to disprove the existence of a Creator, has turned its attention to human society, and has found a place on this planet ten miles square, where a decent man can live in decency, comfort, and security, supporting and educating his children unspoiled and unpolluted, a place where age is revered, infancy respected, manhood respected, and womanhood honored, and human life held in due regard; when skeptics can find such a place ten miles square on this globe where the Gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way and laid the foundations and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for skeptical literati to remove thither and there ventilate their views. But so long as these very men are dependent upon the religion

which they discard for every privilege they enjoy, they may well hesitate a little before they seek to rob the Christian of his hope and humanity of its faith in that Saviour who alone has given to man that hope of life eternal which makes life tolerable and society possible, and robs death of its terrors and the grave of its gloom."

THE PLOT.

MONDAY AFTER THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son.”—Gen. xxvii. 1.

TO-DAY we reach the story of Isaac’s temptation and his fall.

Is it a sin to be tempted? No, for yesterday’s Gospel told us that our Lord Himself was tempted—tempted in all points like as we are and yet without sin. He was without sin in being tempted and He was without sin under temptation; for He yielded not to the enticement. We also know from our own experience that temptation rejected is often turned into a blessing. A rejected temptation becomes a blessing when it reveals to us our own weakness and at the same time turns weakness into strength, as it is written, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.” In the present instance, however, Isaac failed to win such blessedness. He yielded to the evil suggestion without the slightest resistance. He even tempted himself. He was a holy man, given to meditation and prayer, a beautiful example of the contemplative life, one whose days were knit each to each by natural piety, with scarce a trace of worldliness or self-will, and yet he sinned the one great sin of his life because he determined to have his own way, disregarding the known will of God. That so good a man fell so grievously and inexcusably seems strange at first reading and is a striking illustration of the power of sin and of the danger

which ever shadows the believer, shadows even the oldest and most loyal believer. And now let us take up the interesting narrative.

1. One day Isaac decided to make his will; his failing sight and bodily weakness forcing upon him the conclusion that death was near. "Behold, now," he said, "I am old; I know not the day of my death." Notice that Isaac manifests no fear of death. There are many such men. On the other hand, there are many who cannot think of their last earthly moments without singular forebodings. Charles Lamb was a good man, and yet he said, "I would rather set up my tabernacle here; a new state of being staggers me." Another good man, a good Churchman too, Dr. Samuel Johnson, said, "Death is a terrible thing to face. I am horribly afraid." Undoubtedly men of a certain temperament are naturally open to the attacks of this fear; it is constitutional. More than one of us can say, "This terror have I suffered from my youth with a troubled mind; every day of my life has this dark shadow flitted across my soul." Those of us who are greatly disquieted by this dread must have faith that God will help us to meet death, must never permit ourselves to believe that these feelings are signs that we are not living in a state of grace or that God has not accepted and forgiven us. Our blessed Lord experienced the same fear and the biographies of the saints tell us that the best of Christians have trembled when entering the valley of the Shadow of Death. With entire fearlessness Isaac proceeds to set his house in order. He will formally recognize the heir of the birthright and dispose of his earthly goods. In the Office for the Visitation of the Sick there is a rubric which declares that if the sick man "hath not already disposed of his goods,

let him then be admonished to make his will. . . . But men should often be put in remembrance to take order for the settling of their temporal estates whilst they are in health." It is not said, you will observe, that only those who have large fortunes are to be thus exhorted; no, the duty rests upon all who have anything to leave behind. Make your will, then, if you have not made one, and do so at once. If your lawyer tells you you are set upon making a foolish or a wicked will he probably speaks the truth; for lawyers, after all, are usually truthful and conscientious men. And be sure to leave something to the Church. Even one hundred dollars would yield for all time a useful income to your parish or to the blessed work of missions.

2. Now, what were the terms of Isaac's will? "And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out into the field, and take me some venison; And make me savory meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die."

Isaac has determined to hand over to profane Esau the great promise of the Covenant. He could have entertained no doubt that Jacob was the Divinely chosen heir of the blessing. Esau had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. In many other ways he had shown that he placed no value upon a spiritual inheritance. He had married two heathen women of the Hittites; and Isaac knew that the Covenant promise could not descend

upon the sons of these aliens. By his marriage alone Esau had forfeited the primogeniture. Furthermore, the revelation from heaven was couched in unmistakable terms: "The elder shall serve the younger." Isaac knew that his purpose was wrong; we can read his guilt in his conduct. In the first place he acts with unseemly haste—"he is seized with a panic lest his favorite should somehow be left unblest." In the second place he proposes to bless Esau secretly. He knows that his family and dependants would expect such a ceremony to be performed at a public feast, the heir arrayed in the "goodly raiment" of the priestly office, his chieftainship officially recognized, and the whole proceeding hallowed by solemn religious rites. Instead of these open and becoming formalities it is now arranged between father and son that Esau shall assume his heirship by stealth. In the third place we notice that the old man does not, after all, impart the blessing on the instant; he cannot screw his courage to the sticking point; he feels that he must "stimulate his spirit by artificial means; the prophetic ecstasy is not upon him." The narrative also implies that Isaac was accustomed to indulge himself in the pleasures of the table, and knowing from past experience that the exhilaration which comes from the free use of meat and wine would give him strength to carry out a wilful purpose, he tells Esau what he means to do and sends him out to hunt and cook the savory venison which he loves.

3. The consequences of Isaac's sin were immediate and disastrous. He brought rebuke and defeat and humiliation upon himself; and he led each one of the members of his family into sin.

It must be so. When a believing soul deliberately

goes against the known will of God retribution must come and must be heavy. Are none of us praying, "Thy will be done," and at the same time copying Isaac's conduct? You remember how God taught St. Peter that the Kingdom of Heaven was open to all believers and not to the Jews only. The Apostle saw in a vision a great sheet let down before him full of all sorts of animals, clean and unclean, and heard a heavenly voice commanding him to arise and slay and eat. But the impulsive Peter refused to break the letter of the Jewish Law and instantly replied, "Not so, Lord!" So Isaac said, "Not so, Lord! I will not bless Jacob!" So *we* often say, "Not so, Lord!" And to this disobedience all the forlorn experiences of Christians can be traced. Every departure from God's way has in it a sting that we may be turned back into the right road. No doubt Shakespeare recalls boyish memories and experiences when he makes Petruchio ask:

"Who does not know
Where a wasp doth wear his sting?"

By bitter experience we too have learned where the wasps of sin do wear their sting. We have been chastened for our disobedience. Our Heavenly Father has often used His rod in order to teach us the lesson of trust in His goodness and wisdom. Thus our only safe course is to go to God constantly, to seek the Divine guidance in all things, both great and small, yielding ourselves heartily to His will, and never saying, "Not so, Lord." Such trustful obedience is the secret of a happy and useful Christian life. Fénelon has wisely said: "We sleep in peace in the arms of God when we yield ourselves up to His providence in a delightful consciousness of His tender

mercies; no more restless uncertainties, no more anxious desires, no more impatience at the place we are in, for it is God who has put us there, and who holds us in His arms. Can we be unsafe where He has placed us, and where He watches over us as a parent watches a child? This confiding repose, in which earthly care sleeps, is the true vigilance of the heart; yielding itself up to God, with no other support than Him, it thus watches while we sleep."

THE COUNTER-PLOT.

TUESDAY AFTER THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son.”—Gen. xxvii. 5.

“WOMEN will be listening,” says an old commentator who excuses Isaac and blames Rebekah. In fact she is usually charged with being at the bottom of all the mischief recorded in this chapter; whereas the narrative itself points to Isaac as the prime mover in the sin. He it was who led his wife and children into the paths of evil. This does not excuse them, although it explains and accounts for their conduct.

The wilful old man set his own will against the will of God and determined to give to Esau the blessing of the Covenant. We read, “Now Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau.” Probably she was listening behind the door, although it is not expressly so stated; and when Esau hastened out for the hunt she suddenly realized that the knowledge of this guilty secret placed her in a most trying and desperate situation. Now we can hardly imagine, for any woman, a more pathetic and tragic difficulty. Her husband is on the point of committing a terrible sin—a sin which will destroy the chief hope and ambition of her own life and defeat the purpose of Almighty God. Before sunset the promise of the Covenant will be bestowed upon profane Esau and the sons of his heathen wives. What shall she do? Shall she go in and plead with the obstinate old man; or run after the selfish young man with warnings and supplications? No;

for they would reply that she sought only her own way and the welfare of her beloved Jacob.

Then the tempter came, saying to her, “Are not your own well-known ingenuity and *finesse* equal to this emergency? Can you not devise some innocent and justifiable artifice in order to check this iniquity?” And so the outlines of the plot flashed upon her—the counter-plot to the plot of Isaac and Esau. She saw her way clear to beat them at their own game. Had she no thought of the consequences; no prudent recollection of the truth—

“O what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practice to deceive!”

Did no good angel whisper, “Stand still and see the salvation of God. Leave the issue with God; He will bring it to pass and accomplish His own purpose in His own way?” Closing her ears to such holy suggestions Rebekah persuaded herself that the end justified the means. And so the pious fraud began. At once she seeks Jacob, discloses her plan and asks his help: “Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savory meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord, before my death. Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.” Although Jacob was no longer a child but a man of middle age, at least fifty-seven—according to some authorities, seventy-seven—Rebekah lays upon him a mother’s commands. The wily woman knows her influence over him and his deep love for her; and while she trusts to his own self-interest to help win him over to her stratagem, she appeals only to his filial feelings. “Go now to the flock and fetch me from thence two kids of the goats; and I will make them

savory meat for thy father, such as he loveth; and thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death."

But Jacob has a scruple of conscience at this trickery. He already knows the meaning of remorse for sin; and if he has not defined it as "the echo of a lost virtue," he at least anticipates the feelings which the great poet has described in simple and deep words:

"I am afraid to think what I have done."

"I fear," said Jacob, "that I shall bring a curse upon me and not a blessing." Rebekah, however, assured that she is about to win a benediction and not a malediction—in her impulsive and unselfish affection for the darling of her heart—and impatient with his hesitancy, boldly takes upon herself the moral responsibility, crying out, "Upon me be thy curse, my son; only obey my voice." And Jacob obeyed. Then Rebekah "put the skins of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck. And she gave the savory meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob."

Look for a moment at the first of the two motives which led Rebekah into this wickedness. It was her love for Jacob. As Robertson of Brighton truly says, "Rebekah desired nothing for herself, but for Jacob; for him spiritual blessing, at all events temporal distinction; doing wrong not for her own advantage but for the sake of one she loved. It is a touch of womanhood. There are persons who would romantically admire this devotion of Rebekah and call it beautiful. To sacrifice all, even principle, for another—what higher proof of affection can there be? O miserable sophistry! The only true affection is that which is subordinate to a higher.

It has been truly said that in those who love little, love is a primary affection,—a secondary one in those who love much. Be sure he cannot love another much ‘ who loves not honor more.’ ” It is unsanctified and Rebekah-like love which to-day prompts the mother to conceal her son’s waywardness and encourages him to seek the companionship of worldly people because they are people of fashion; which prompts her to teach her daughter to accept the attentions of an evil man because he has wealth or social position.

Again, in Rebekah’s plot we see one of the earliest examples of doing evil that good may come. This satanic suggestion that the end justifies the means still comes to us all. Sometimes it is very hard to wait for God’s providence. A slight effort of our own, a trifling misrepresentation, an unnoticed evasion, an ambiguous letter, a little intrigue — and the prize, already so near, may become our own. What are natural shrewdness and foresight given us for if not to help ourselves with ? And so we pluck the fruit before it is ripe. These attempts to force the hand of God are faithless and foolish. God had promised that Jacob should have the birthright. Could not Rebekah trust His word and wait His time ? We cannot declare too plainly or too emphatically that however good or sacred the end in view all fraud and deception and crookedness are hateful to God. As holy George Herbert manfully says, “ Dare to be true; nothing can need a lie.” And shall we gain any real and permanent good by craft ? We are told that high ecclesiastical honors, the temporal prosperity of parishes and dioceses, liberal endowments for educational and charitable institutions are frequently thus secured; that the fortunes of many estimable laymen can be traced back to

some such turning-point. But the unanimous voice of Christian experience assures us that while God brings good out of evil, nevertheless, every short cut to success and every fraudulent gain carries its own penalty with it. And what has been our own experience ? What have we gained by trickery ? Either we have failed to win by our arts, or they have recoiled against ourselves, or our seeming success is but temporary, and in reality a curse and not a blessing. "That which is won ill will never wear well." Thank God, the Church of the English-speaking people has never failed to maintain that guile is a proof of weakness; that a gentleman and a Christian must play the man and speak the truth !

Furthermore, this old narrative is clear in its morals. We see that Rebekah cannot sin and go free. The punishment God meted out to her was poetical in its justice. In a few days her dear Jacob, for whom she sinned, is sent empty-handed away from home; and his mother never sees him again in this world.

What we all want, then, is a heart that is free from guile. One of the English poets tells us, "An honest man 's the noblest work of God," and the Psalmist said, "Truly God is loving unto Israel, even unto such as are of a clean heart." "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile,"—one, that is, whose daily life is quite free from oblique arts and treacherous thoughts, who has no deceit or craftiness in him; who possesses his soul with patience when his plans seem to miscarry, and when things turn against him holds fast to his faith that God will in due season "make his righteousness as clear as the light, and his just dealing as the noonday." No other inner life can please a holy God or win His reward here or

hereafter. Sincerity, honesty, straightforward ways and words, are therefore the ideals which we must ever set before ourselves. The story of Rebekah's guile will not have been written in vain if it leads one of us to form the resolution henceforth to forsake such hateful practices; to be sure that we not only aim to accomplish ends that are honorable, but that we also seek to bring them to pass by means equally fair and open, never forgetting that

“Him, only him, the shield of Heaven defends
Whose means are fair and spotless as his ends.”

THE STOLEN BLESSING.

WEDNESDAY AFTER THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

“The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”—
Gen. xxvii. 22.

TO-DAY we reach the story of the stolen blessing. When his mother proposed the plot to Jacob, his conscience for a time held him back. A philosopher has said that some persons follow the dictates of their conscience only in the sense in which a coachman may be said to follow the horses he is driving. If this be a correct description of Rebekah’s present relation to her conscience we might add that when she whipped up the horses they started off at full speed. Jacob—to carry on the illustration—might be described as a passenger who, with many misgivings, has been all but thrust into the coach by force of hands, yet who soon, entering into the spirit of the adventure, resolves to expect a safe and profitable journey.

To return to the narrative: Jacob, with the goatskins upon his neck, took the savory dish in his hand and entered his father’s chamber. Carefully imitating Esau’s voice, he addressed Isaac with the usual Oriental salutation. Isaac failed to recognize the disguised tones; and in some uncertainty the blind old eyes turned toward the visitor and the feeble voice inquired, “Who art thou, my son?” Jacob had hoped to accomplish his purpose—to secure his own—with a few “white lies,” and with no great effort. Now his keen mind is instantly awake

to the fact that he has entered upon a hazardous undertaking. If he would succeed he must allay his father's suspicions at whatever cost. Without a moment's hesitation he shows himself an accomplished liar; heaping falsehood upon falsehood: "I am Esau, thy first-born"—lie number one; "I have done according as thou badest me"—lie number two; "Arise, I pray thee, and eat of *my* venison"—lie number three. One lie usually requires another to support or conceal it; and Jacob soon found himself "drifting, drifting from the great shore of truth, like one carried out by the tide against his will." Surprised that Esau should have returned so early from the hunt, Isaac asks, with the curiosity of age, "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" With reckless blasphemy Jacob declares that God has helped him, "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me," or, more literally, "Because the Lord thy God gave me good speed." But even in this solemn assertion the sharp ear of the blind old man detects an accent which arouses his suspicions afresh and he determines to satisfy himself by the sense of touch. "And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not;" and Jacob, with a boldness worthy of a better cause, "went near unto Isaac, his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau;" and he said, apparently satisfied when he had felt the hair of the goat-skins, but still demanding one more positive and unqualified assertion, "Art thou my very son Esau?" "Had it been I," says Martin Luther, "I should have let the dish fall and run away in terror." But Jacob is ready for the last lie. Each step in his downfall is marked with grosser

hypocrisy and deeper guilt — so facile is the descent into Avernus—and Jacob declares, with unruffled composure, “I am.”

Isaac’s doubts were dispelled. He accepted the savory meat, the bread and the wine, and bestowed upon the impostor the blessing of Abraham. Both temporal and spiritual dominion were imparted to Jacob. He should possess “the fatness of the land, and be lord over his brethren.” Although Isaac believed that he was blessing Esau his words were inspired, for unconsciously he was fulfilling the will of God. Jacob was the chosen heir of the Covenant, the blessing belonged to him, and, in spite of his father’s sin in seeking to give it to another, in spite of the fact that he secured it by tricks and treachery, the blessing was duly and actually made over to him in accordance with the will of God:—“And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. And he came near and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed: Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.” This blessing was a prophecy which was fulfilled to the letter in the days to come. It bestowed upon the Heel-catcher and Supplanter the primacy he had long coveted and plotted for, which he finally won by shameful fraud.

Jacob’s sin in all its naked hideousness is frankly set down in Scripture narrative, and we have not attempted

to gloss over the record. But Jacob is the hero of the tale; his future course is to occupy our thoughts during the days of Lent; and you will naturally ask whether nothing can be said in excuse or extenuation of his sin. Yes, there are excuses for Jacob.

1. In the first place, one whom he loved and regarded as wiser and holier than himself led him into temptation. And Rebekah was a tempter of the tempters. A woman of great strength of character, of quick wit and pleasing manner, she had also the advantage of the experiences of age. In these days we hear a great deal of "magnetic" men and of their success as politicians, promoters, and leaders; of the "new" woman and her ingenious, irresistible, audacious methods of accomplishing her own ends. As a matter of fact, although it may seem a strange thing to our ears, there is no human being so difficult to resist, so absolutely sure of having her own way, as a strong, shrewd, wily, determined *old* woman of gentle blood and breeding. Age multiplies her power. Of this fact the great masters of fiction are not ignorant, and it is corroborated by our own experience. And if to strength of will, and the lessons of past failures and successes, and long practice in the art of persuasion we add a deep religious conviction that she is called to be an instrument in fulfilling the designs of Providence — in such hands the best of us are as wax. Jacob was outmatched.

2. We should also remember that Jacob felt a prick of conscience when the wickedness was proposed to him, which is more than can be said for any other actor in this domestic drama; and that he had little beside that prick of conscience to restrain him. Our present moral standard has been a matter of slow growth. Take the utterances of two representative Church people as the best

nineteenth-century estimate of all over-reaching, deceit, and guile. Mrs. Jameson writes: "All my own experience of life teaches me the contempt of cunning, not the fear. I never knew a cunning mind which was not either shallow, or, on some points, diseased." Mr. Ruskin, speaking of the same failing, says: "It is the intensest rendering of vulgarity, absolute and utter." But in Jacob's day the race had reached no such standard of manners or morals. It is more than possible that Jacob's guile was recorded, for one reason, to teach the ages all along a nobler and diviner code.

3. Notice, too, that when he lied and personated and blasphemed, Jacob was an unconverted man. He had received the rite of circumcision, he had enjoyed a religious training, but as yet he had seen no Ladder-vision nor wrestled with any nameless Friend. His sin was the sin of one who has never consciously dedicated himself to God's service or felt the touch of heaven upon his heart.

4. Again, Jacob was punished for his sin. At once he was banished from his home for years and from his mother forever. All his life long this deceiver was deceived; and he received the due reward of his deeds. Let us pity Jacob, then, and judge him with no hard judgment; for it is written of him, "Blessed be he that blesseth thee," and we would make that blessing our own.

The story of Jacob's temptation and fall also suggests two practical lessons, one of warning, one of encouragement.

The fact that he was led into evil by another may admonish us to watch and pray lest we lead into temptation those who love and trust us. Holy men speak of nine ways of leading others into sin, or of participating

in another's sin: by counsel, by command, by consent, by provocation, by praise or flattery, by concealment, by partaking, by silence, by defence of the ill done. In each and every one of these ways Rebekah participated in Jacob's sin. To make a careful self-examination lest in some of these ways our own influence and example be evil will be work for Lent.

The lesson of encouragement is, that although Jacob sinned God did not cast him off or cease to love him. He brought good out of evil; and finally Jacob became the Prince of God. Let us take courage. We may see in ourselves much that was in fallen Jacob; but if God chastened and forgave and loved him, surely there is hope for us. "Though ye have lain among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove that is covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold."

THE BITTER CRY.

THURSDAY AFTER THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.”—Gen. xxvii. 34.

ISAAC'S blindness made possible the deception practised upon him. Of all the ills which flesh is heir to, probably few of us would, if we had the power of choice, choose blindness. The thought of sightlessness brings with it the chill of death. To see no more the stars that gem the sky, the flowers that jewel the green robe of nature, the lights and shadows dancing on the hills, in helplessness to be fed and led, to read no more, nor ever again to see in this world the faces that we love — this is blindness. Nevertheless the blind man clings to life, and does good or evil, is good or evil, even as we who have sight. In blind Milton's lament for his lost sight there is a beautiful prayer which might well be offered by those whose natural sight is undimmed: “Thou, Celestial Light, shine inward; all mists from thence purge and disperse.”

Blind Isaac was on the side of righteousness; his life in its controlling purposes, in the habit of its career, was a God-fearing life; but for once and for the time being he has fallen into mortal sin. In the sinfulness of self-will he decides to bless profane Esau; he thinks he has accomplished his purpose; in reality he has imparted the blessing to Jacob, who in his dissimulation and his

disguise is, after all, the son to whom the blessing belongs. But the blind old man believes that he has blessed Esau, his first-born and the best beloved. When Jacob retires with his blessing Isaac doubtless reclines upon his couch of skin in the buoyant and blithesome contentment of a man who has made his point. Notwithstanding his blindness and feebleness, he has triumphed. He has outmanœuvred his manœuvring wife and out-plotted his plotting son. The satisfaction of his agreeable reflections, however, is rudely broken into by a loud voice and a heavy footfall at the door. "And it came to pass," we read, "as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother," the real Esau, "came in from his hunting." The startling facts were soon discovered. When Isaac realized that involuntarily and unconsciously he had blessed the Lord's choice, "he trembled very exceedingly—he trembled with a great trembling, greatly." He did not tremble with anger at the duplicity of Rebekah and Jacob, nor with amazement at this unexpected defeat of his heart's desire; he trembled with alarm at the sudden retribution of his sin in attempting to thwart the purpose of God. He was the heir of promise and he had the spiritual insight at once to perceive the hand of God in the day's doings and grace to submit to the will of God. "I have blessed him," he said to Esau, "yea, and he shall be blessed."

"And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry," literally, for the expressive Hebrew words are more graphic, "he cried a cry, great and bitter exceedingly, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father."

In this mingled cry of anger and envy and anguish Esau showed that he had no discernment of spiritual things. He did not recognize the hand of God in the events of the day. He looked upon his father merely as a powerful chieftain who could do what he would with his own. He thought the blessing of Abraham carried with it some worldly advantages and that his tears and supplications might induce his father to change his mind and give him a part at least of the inheritance. To this bitter cry Isaac resolutely refused to yield. He acknowledged Jacob's duplicity, "Thy brother came with subtilty," at the same time declaring that he cannot recall the past, for "he hath taken away thy blessing." In reply Esau accused his brother and said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob—the Supplanter, the Heel-catcher?" Finding that this outburst of indignation failed to move his father, he resorted once more to tears and entreaties, "Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me, O my father?" When Esau thus sought a lesser or secondary blessing he had in mind chiefly the "corn and wine," earthly goods and earthly honor; he manifested nothing of that spirit which animated the Syro-Phœnician woman, of whom we shall read in next Sunday's Gospel, who reminded our Lord that even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table, and who was ready to accept any spiritual privilege which might in mercy be bestowed upon her. On the contrary Esau took the bitter and envious tone of the elder son in the parable, "Thou never gavest me a kid." But Esau will not be refused. With a persistency and a pathos which touch us to this day he cried again, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept."

It is to be feared that one of our hymns which contains the refrain, "Even me, even me," is based upon an erroneous interpretation of the passage before us, although the hymn considered in itself may not be especially open to criticism. It is certain that much harm has been done by a popular misunderstanding of the New Testament reference to Esau's present frame of mind and heart. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, "Esau found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." This does not mean that Esau desired to repent of sins and could not. What could be falser than such an affirmation? Whenever any soul anywhere truly seeks to repent, repentance has already begun. Esau did not confess that he had sinned, he felt no sorrow for sin, he made no resolution of amendment. His actual spiritual state is revealed by his own words: "The days of mourning for my father are at hand: then will I slay my brother Jacob." When he wept before his father his tears were idle tears; they did not spring from the depths of some divine despair. There was nothing divine in his grief. His repentance consisted in wishing to undo what had been done. His first thought was of the inheritance, and he was, in fact, contesting his father's will before the death of the testator. It may be, too, that as he wept some sobering thought came to him of the days that were no more. If so, he was learning the lesson many of us know so well. The clock will not strike again for us the hours that are gone. The mill will not grind again with the water that is past. Deeds are irrevocable.

There are three kinds of false repentance which may be mentioned:

1. The first we shall call a Lent Repentance. Boswell,

the biographer of Dr. Johnson, furnishes an example. When his own diary saw the light we learned that he was the slave of two besetting and deadly sins. Still, as Lent came round, he made his vow of penitence and kept it too—so long as Lent lasted. He gives us to understand that he intended to wrestle with his sin and keep it down only until Easter Day. “Then,” he seems to say with an older sinner, “I will seek it yet again.”

2. A second form of false repentance is the repentance of one who is found out. So little value has such sorrow for sin that it seldom leads to a changed life. In fact it does not deserve the name of repentance, for it regrets not the deed but its detection. As some one has said, “Thou shalt not get found out,” is not one of God’s commandments, and no man can be saved by trying to keep it. The warning of Holy Scripture goes further and deeper: “Be sure your sin will find you out.”

3. Esau is an example of the third form of repentance. He weeps not for what he has done but for what he has lost. The past, however, is unalterable. Wasted opportunities, words of passion, deeds of shame, can never be recalled. We must reap whatsoever we have sown.

Let us take home with us the thought of a true repentance. The counterfeit coin is proof that there is a genuine coinage. And if there be a false repentance we know that there is a godly sorrow for sin. The marvellous mercy and the inexhaustible and inexpressible love revealed in the Gospel still hold out hope for us all. St. Paul can rejoice that his converts are “made sorry after a godly manner.” May that “godly sorrow,” which “worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of” be felt in our hearts and shown forth in our lives.

Remember too that from Christ our Lord comes the

grace of contrition as well as the pardon of sin and the strength for amendment of life. That grace enables the true penitent to see and feel that he has broken his Heavenly Father's law and grieved that Father's heart of love; the thought which dominates all his thoughts and never leaves him is, that he has sinned against God. This is the language of his heart: "Against *Thee only* have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight." And it follows that the genuineness of sorrow for sin is proved when our sorrows "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." In the terse statement of St. Ambrose, "True repentance is to cease from sin."

"'T is to bewail the sins thou didst commit ;
And not commit those sins thou hast bewailed.
He that bewails, and not forsakes them too,
Confesses rather what he means to do."

THE ANGER OF ESAU.

FRIDAY AFTER THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him : And Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand ; then will I slay my brother Jacob.”—Gen. xxvii. 41.

WHAT a man says in his heart reveals the man. The inward conversation is a spiritual barometer which the Recording Angel keeps ever under his sight. When Esau discovered that his brother had over-reached him and won the blessing, his anger knew no bounds; he “hated Jacob,” we are told, “and said in his heart, I will slay my brother.”

The hating heart still remains upon the earth. Our text, which calls attention to the sin of anger, is, therefore, neither obsolete nor untimely.

The word “anger” is derived from a Latin root signifying, primarily, a *choking*, an oppression of the throat. Anger has been defined as “a strong passion or emotion of the mind, excited by a real or supposed injury to, or intent to injure, one’s self or others.” It has also been called “a temporary madness.” But we all know what anger is. Derivations and definitions are superfluous.

It is true that there are times and occasions when we have a right to be angry. There is a righteous indignation. Our Blessed Lord Himself knew such anger, for he fiercely rebuked oppression and hypocrisy, and with bitter words and blows drove the money-changers from the temple. The Epistles recognize this aspect of the

subject: "Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath;" "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

These, and other similar passages, teach us that there are times when we cannot keep down our anger, and that there are some things against which it would be a sin not to feel the keenest anger. And what is it that justifies anger? In plain, unmistakable words, when and where is wrath a Christian virtue? Let a holy man of old give us the answer: "He that would be angry and sin not, must not be angry with anything but sin."

On the other hand do we not all know to our sorrow that there is an anger like Esau's, an anger which is not righteous, which is evil from its inception, or, if justified at first, soon develops into the blackest guilt? That sin the Church has placed in the list of the seven deadly sins. And like other sins, this sin of anger passes through the three phases of thought, word, and deed. Almost irresistibly, and sometimes with astonishing rapidity, anger proceeds from thought to word and from word to deed.

In a Lenten sermon we expect plain-speaking. Now, the truth of the matter is that we Americans are an irritable and short-tempered people. One of the first things we notice in travelling abroad is the universal good-temper of the natives; even the surly Briton seems to us a model of pleasantness and amiability. A young American once journeyed direct from a southwestern frontier town to London. In that frontier settlement one room was the post-office, hotel parlor, department store, saloon, and only place of general assemblage. And every night a company of desperadoes came in from the hills and took possession. Finally a quiet, slender young man, who thought he could maintain order, was

installed behind the bar. He used the only effective measures and soon was master of the place. But it was noticed that whenever this quiet young man shot to kill, he first *turned pale with anger*. Oliver Wendell Holmes somewhere says that when the fighting boy of his school met the village bully, the issue ceased to be doubtful as soon as the students' champion turned pale. But in London, during his stay of several months, our traveller did not see a single man turn pale with anger. Neither can it be denied that the American woman has a temper of her own. Are not sharp words, sullen looks, and angry actions, on the part of women of station and refinement, frequently to be observed in our streets and cars and shops? In the old country, on the contrary, such manifestations, as many witnesses bear record, are very rare. And what shall we say of our homes? We may cast the blame upon our dry climate, which is doubtless bad for the nerves. Still the fact remains that in multitudes of our Christian homes angry women's voices rise, frightening happiness away. Do sweet and sunny tempers really reign in your home? Then you need envy none, and you have much to be thankful for. I have sometimes thought that if one of those ingenious instruments invented by Mr. Edison, which receives and reproduces all that is said before it, were placed in all our homes and opened on Sunday morning in a general gathering of the family, so that each one of us could hear every word we had spoken in the home during the week, and catch the actual tone and accent, we might, when we reached church, pray with a far deeper sense of need, "Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners." Real, practical, every-day Christianity often turns upon this very question of temper. And the more we think of it

the more truth there seems to be in that somewhat startling saying attributed to a well-known English bishop, "Temper is nine tenths of Christianity."

It is also to be noted that temper, good and bad, is catching. In an old letter, James Freeman Clarke describes a journey from his home in Boston to Kentucky. He travelled by stage-coach, and he noticed that one cross and complaining and ill-natured passenger could put all the others out of temper. "But once," he says, "when journeying through the Cattaraugus woods, where the road was mostly deep mire or rough corduroy, and there was every temptation to be cross and uncomfortable, one man so enlivened and entertained our party, and was so accommodating and good-natured, that we seemed to be having a pleasant picnic, and the other inmates of the coach took the same tone." What was true of that old stage-coach is true to-day of the shop, the office, the mill, the school, and the home.

But alas! the evil of which we are speaking does not end in the miseries of social unpleasantness. What a brood of malignant passions and fiendish deeds springs from this one root-sin. Every student knows the significance of words. Let us take a partial list of the words in our own tongue, in common use, which express some of the phases of this sin of anger: Prejudice, false judgment, envy, malice, spite, antipathy, displeasure, enmity, abhorrence, animosity, aversion, detestation, dislike, grudge, hostility, ill-will, malevolence, malignity, rancor, repugnance, revenge, choler, exasperation, ire, irritation, offence, impatience, fretfulness, indignation, passion, peevishness, pettishness, petulance, acrimony, acerbity, asperity, bitterness, unkindness, virulence, causticity, harshness, moroseness, severity, sourness, tartness,

churlishness, crabbedness, crustiness, doggedness, gloominess, gruffness, ill-humor, snappishness, sulkiness, sullenness, surliness, abusiveness, quarrelsomeness, savageness, vindictiveness, hatred, wrath, rage, fury, cruelty, murder. This list is not exhaustive, and yet what a catalogue of unlovely human characteristics do these words reveal! We must admit, too, that these words were not coined needlessly, and that each one of them really does describe some manifestation in men and women of this root-sin of anger.

Take hatred alone. If ever you hated any one, you know what unhappiness is. Hannah More said, "If I wanted to punish an enemy, it would be by fastening on him the trouble of constantly hating somebody." And hatred soon passes into a longing for revenge. "I will get even with him." Does that thought come to you from time to time? Banish it, for it comes straight from hell. In our text Esau declared that he would have revenge—"I will kill my brother." Truly says the Apostle of love, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." "And ye know," he says again, "that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

As Christians we are pledged to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; and forgave and prayed for those who did the wrong. To cherish hatred, to be unforgiving, to long for revenge, is to be un-Christlike. All who have ever been close followers of the Master have been forgiving. Of Cranmer it was said, "If you want him to do you a good turn you must do him a bad one."

And now comes the practical question, how shall we overcome this sin? Jeremy Taylor's rule is a good one: "If anger arises suddenly and violently, first restrain it

with consideration, and then let it end in a hearty prayer for him who did the real or seeming injury. The former of the two stops its growth; the latter quite kills it."

To forgive is Christlike. Not to forgive unfits us to receive the Holy Communion or to say the Lord's Prayer. Wherefore "let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

THE DAUGHTERS OF HETH.

SATURDAY AFTER THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Rebekah said unto Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth.”—Gen. xxvii. 46.

WHAT was the cause and occasion of this characteristic utterance of the text? It was the quarrel between Esau and Jacob. Jacob had deceived his father and gained the blessing of promise. Esau had received a lesser blessing — a fat land and a roving life — the career for which he had prepared himself. And so his name henceforth became “Edom” and his children were called the Edomites. Later on Jacob’s name also was changed and he became “Israel” and his descendants were the children of Israel. And there was enmity between the two.

The blessings of Isaac were, therefore, prophecies as well as blessings, as the commentators have pointed out, and were not limited to the personal histories of the twin brothers, but prefigured also the destinies of the nations of which they were the founders. In this sense we are to interpret the words of a later Scripture, “Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.” Edom was for centuries the foe of Israel and then became the synonym of evil, while Israel represented the cause of God in the world and foretold the Church of Christ. Jacob was the spiritual man and to him belonged the spiritual heritage; Esau was the natural man and could be the legitimate heir only of the things of the world. In this larger sense

they were pictures and prophecies, for an age which required such concrete conceptions, to represent the principles of good and evil and the conflict between them. Neither was the representation marred by the fact that one brother was not wholly good nor the other wholly bad. One believed in the earth, and the other believed in the things above his head. Here was a distinction, vital, unmistakable. The rudest tribesman would instantly grasp the significance of that distinction.

“ And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him ” — a hatred that lasted as long as the nations of Edom and Israel lasted, a hatred that still lasts. “ And Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand ; then will I slay my brother Jacob.” In these words we see that while Esau stands for the principle of evil he was not himself entirely devoid of good natural feelings and dispositions. He loved his father. He would not embitter his father’s dying hours with the horror of bloodshed. He would wait until his father died in peace, was decently buried, and dutifully mourned for ; then he would murder Jacob.

We are told that Esau “ said *in his heart* I will slay my brother ! ” As the days passed, however, he probably took some of his dependants or hunting companions into his confidence, for his mother was in some way informed of his determination and at once devised a plan to prevent his crime. “ And she sent and called Jacob, her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice ; and arise, flee thou to Laban, my brother, to Haran ; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother’s fury turn away.” She knows that Esau is an impulsive man. If

Jacob will keep out of his sight for a few days she is confident that Esau's anger will subside. "Then I will send and fetch you from thence; for why should I be deprived of you both in one day?"

Jacob realized his danger and eagerly agreed to this temporary banishment from home. But Jacob could not go away without his father's knowledge and consent. To win that consent Rebekah resorted to a subterfuge. She wished to conceal from Isaac the dreadful tragedy which brooded over his house—surely it could not be wrong to let the old man die in peace; and so she once more employed those subterranean methods in the use of which she was by no means a novice. She went at once to Isaac's chamber and set up a great weeping and lamentation over the shortcomings of Esau's heathen wives: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth!" The modern querulousness which likewise declares its weariness of life and asks, "Is life worth living?" if not as insincere as Rebekah was, would do well to ask itself if Rebekah's sin is not at the root of that inner dissatisfaction and disappointment which prompts such utterance. Rebekah craftily continues her passion of weeping, will not hear a word of comfort, holds on with her assumed grief, and keeps it up until she sees that her husband also is very weary of the little life that remains to him. At this point she is ready for another move. And so, calming herself somewhat, she shrewdly suggests, without seeming to do so, a remedy for her distress: "If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, which are the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" Man-like, Isaac walks straight into the trap. So long as his wife wailed over the faults of her daughters-in-law he was as helpless as any man in similar

circumstances, but when Jacob is mentioned he sees his way clear. "Jacob is still single," he says, "and I will assert my authority in his case. The boy shall do as I did. He shall go at once to Padan-aram and get a wife. I found a good and beautiful wife there and so may Jacob. Call him, and I will start him on his journey. We will hear no more of the daughters of Heth." Thereupon Rebekah dries her tears and goes away in search of Jacob.

When Jacob enters the chamber his father immediately gives him his command: "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother." Then he voluntarily and deliberately bestows upon Jacob once more the blessing already secured by fraud: "God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham." Thus blessed, Jacob departs upon his eventful journey.

The narrative before us this morning suggests three thoughts which we shall do well to carry home and remember.

1. See, first, how short-sighted men and women are. Isaac supposed that death was near. Esau said, "My father will die in a few hours; then I will slay my brother." But they were mistaken. Isaac lived forty-three long years more, and Esau never slew his brother. Rebekah thought Jacob would return to her in a few days, and Jacob imagined that when his father died he would take his place and be reunited to his mother; but they, too, were mistaken. Rebekah never saw Jacob again, and Jacob's absence was not for a few days only, but for twenty years. How true it is that man proposes and

God disposes! How true is the Scripture saying, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

2. Again, what was it that broke up that old home and embittered the life of all its inmates? Each one of us knows to his own shame and sorrow what it was; it was what Amiel, who has so deeply impressed himself upon the present generation, calls "an instinct of revolt, an enemy of law, the savage within us, seditious, impious, insolent, refractory, opposed to and contemptuous of all that tries to rule;" what Byron calls

"That pang, where more than madness lies,
The worm that will not sleep and never dies;"

what the New Testament calls *sin*; that burden on the soul which no son or daughter of Adam ever wholly escapes. Nor can we escape the consequences of sin. As the shadow follows the body so the consciousness of guilt follows sin. When you walk toward the rising sun the shadow lurks behind you; as the day advances the shadow reaches your side; at high noon, small, faint, but visible, it is beneath your feet; as the day hastens into the west, the shadow boldly goes before lengthening, darkening. As long as you have a body and the light lasts the shadow goes with you. So sin shadows the soul. Can we look within ourselves, steadily, honestly, and wonder that there should be a Good Friday and a Cross on Calvary? Beholding that Cross, realizing the need of that Sacrifice, with true faith in its power to make atonement for sin, shall we not fall upon our knees and cry, "O Lord Jesus Christ, pardon what I have been, sanctify what I am, and order what I shall be, that Thine may be the glory and mine the eternal salvation?"

3. The narrative before us also recalls that blessed prophecy contained in one of our Holy Week Epistles. Isaiah there speaks of the conflict between sin and holiness prefigured in the enmity between Edom and Israel, and he foresees its end. "Who is this that cometh from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah?" And the Divine One replies, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save, I have trodden the wine press alone, and the year of My redeemed is come." All that Esau or Edom symbolized was overthrown on Calvary. It remains for us only to make that victory our own. Good and evil will not contend forever. The issue is not uncertain. The struggle is not unending. On which side are we to-day? Can we say, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ?"

THE DREAM.

MONDAY AFTER THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed.”—Gen. xxviii. 11, 12.

JACOB’S sin has found him out. He is banished from home. Banishment is the first fruit of his blessing. Nominally he is going away to find a wife; in reality, and first of all, he is leaving his childhood’s home to escape his brother’s murderous purpose of revenge. His heart is heavy as he plods on alone through unfamiliar scenes; and he is forced to acknowledge to himself that he is suffering the due reward of his deeds. But, although he knows it not, God’s love is seeking him out in his punishment and preparing the providences through which he is to be trained for a larger benediction.

Jacob’s journey led him northward over tracts known in later times as the highlands of Judea and Samaria — historic ground for the future. On the second or third day, towards evening, he reached a certain hill-top “and tarried there all night.” Modern travellers give us vivid descriptions of this rugged elevation. As Jacob looked about before composing himself to sleep he would notice that he was almost entirely surrounded by the rocky peaks which stood near by like sentinels keeping watch upon the place. In one direction only was there an opening among the heights, and through this his eye would

take in a long stretch of open country and, beyond it, the hills and valleys "gradually receding and reaching in a long succession to Mount Moriah and the hills which in later times stood round about Jerusalem." Yes, fourteen miles in the distance he could see Mount Moriah, where, on an altar, his father Isaac had once lain with the sacrificial knife gleaming over him—a type of that true Isaac who in the fulness of time should offer Himself upon that same Mount Moriah and suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; making there, by His one oblation of Himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. We do not know whether he recalled the past or foresaw the future. Probably never before had he been so far from the level plains of Beersheba, and the grandeur of the strange, new panorama stretching before him must have quickened and brought to a climax the serious and solemn thoughts which had accompanied him on his journey. As the darkness falls he finds a stone for his pillow. Alone, helpless, going he knows not whither, his sin rises before him, torments him, convicts him! The blessing for which he has sinned, what is it? Now that it is his own, will it bring him comfort or protection? With his head on the stone and his eyes turned upward to the stars, in the loneliness and silence of the mountains, we may believe that his soul lifted itself up to God in repentance for the past and in faith for the future. It must have been so. The vision of that night was not disclosed to a heart unprepared for the gracious revelation.

At length he slept, and in that sleep, he dreamed his Dream. He fell asleep—

"A sleep full of sweet dreams,"

Dreams have a literature of their own. In all our classics there are allusions to them. The Old Testament contains the record of many dreams. In this way God often spake to His servants of old. Dreams are also recognized in the New Testament as channels of Divine communication to the soul. In "a dream which was not all a dream" Pontius Pilate's wife suffered many things concerning Jesus.

And we all dream. Usually our dreams are suggested or inspired by the events of the day. They seem a faint, often a distorted, or broken, or weary repetition of our waking thoughts and acts. Hood's "Song of the Shirt" is immortal because the common heart recognizes in the poor, worn-out, and hungry woman who fell asleep over her task and sewed on buttons in a dream, the pathetic interpretation of its own experience. So, often, with all our tasks; in a dream the driver speaks to his horse, the mother cares for her babe, the business man buys and sells, the teacher gives instruction, and the preacher expounds and exhorts. But there are dreams of another sort, wild and wicked dreams, dreams not inspired by any waking act or thought. Have you never been shocked and horrified by your own dreams? annoyed that there is within you, somewhere, so much that is violent, impure, or dishonorable? Probably, however, we cannot sin in our sleep. "I talk of dreams," says Shakespeare, "which are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain fantasy." Yet holy men have taught that frightful dreams and restless sleep may be the Spirit's warnings of sinful ways of life and calls to repentance. Does some one say, "It is indigestion, and not sin, that gives people bad dreams?" But remember that Jesus Christ came to save your body as well as your soul; that

your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that, therefore, the self-indulgence, the worry, the over-work, which causes broken sleep, may be as much a sin as the lie or the hating heart that stings the conscience and gives you frightful dreams. And so the day that has been passed soberly, temperately, and in the fear of God, usually ends in a night of peaceful sleep or beautiful dreams, watched over by the holy angels who keep guard against the hosts of evil thoughts and evil memories.

While Jacob slept he dreamed and in that dream there came to him a revelation: "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending upon it;" and from the heavenly heights he heard the voice of his father's God promising him protection and guidance, and blessings, both temporal and spiritual.

Heretofore Jacob has had no personal knowledge of the unseen world and there has been no touch of heaven upon his soul. Now he begins to understand the meaning of the birthright and the blessing; now he learns that the other world is as real as this one and that there is a way from earth to heaven and from heaven to earth. From this night forward Jacob is a believer. The Vision of the Ladder was the turning-point in his spiritual history. He rises up a changed man.

In studying the life of Jacob our chief purpose is to trace the steps by which a human soul possessing the strongest inborn love of self, with the intellectual strength to bend other wills to its will, and to form long purposes of personal advancement, and to adhere to them, under the discipline of a loving Heavenly Father, develops nobler aims, a sensitiveness of conscience, a habit of

fervent prayer, an intelligent faith, and a readiness to submit that masterful will to the will of God. We are trying to see how it was that the Heel-catcher became Israel, the Prince of God. The narrative before us shows when the change began.

To-day let us confine our attention to one feature of Jacob's conversion; I mean the fact that he was alone when God spake to his soul. Each human soul comes into the world alone and leaves it alone. While it lives here it dwells in solitude. Nothing is stranger or more solemn than the loneliness of the soul. We are told that there are layers of air between the atoms of the most closely compacted bodies. Each soul is such an atom, distinct, separate; or better still, we are islands all in an unbounded sea. The infant has never thought "this is I," but in a few years he learns the use of "I" and "me," and finds "I am not what I see; and other than the things I touch;" and one day, as the seasons pass, "his isolation grows defined." When that solitude of the soul is felt, God speaks. With more or less distinctness each Christian recalls the day or days when for the first time the soul became conscious of its isolation, and, in that conscious solitude, heard the Voice Divine. Jacob's separation from human companionship was, therefore, providential. And so God in mercy arranges solitudes for us. We are shut up in a sick room, we are called upon a journey, the companions almost always with us are separated from us by the changes and chances of life and death. Then, when we are alone, the thought of personality flashes upon us and God speaks. Is it not so? When you made the great choice between God and self you were alone with your Saviour. Each succeeding forward movement in the life of grace also dates from a

season of private prayer. Let us, then, not shrink from that solitude, but rather seek and love it. The New Testament saying, "Many were coming and going and there was no leisure," is an alarmingly accurate description of the life of our own day. Let us make the most of the Church's seasons of retirement, and frequently secure some hour in which we can be alone on the mountain-top to behold the Vision of the Ladder that joins earth to heaven.

THE LADDER.

TUESDAY AFTER THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it.”—Gen. xxviii. 12, 13.

THE Vision of the Ladder brought with it a conviction which never departed from Jacob's soul. We know, too, that it fastened itself upon the memory and imagination of his descendants. No Jew ever forgot, ever will forget, that his great ancestor saw heaven and earth joined together. And Christians from childhood have loved and meditated upon that vision.

In speaking of the ladder our text first tells us when the vision came to Jacob, when he was asleep and in dreams, and continues the narrative in three descriptive clauses, each of which begins with the word “behold.” These natural divisions we will follow to-day.

I. “And he dreamed, and behold.” Notice the significance of this statement. The narrative is entirely free from anything which might awaken suspicion as to its veracity. It is not said that Jacob saw the ladder in broad daylight, or that he really looked upon it at all. We are told that it was a *dream*. The story of Jacob's life runs along almost without exception in the same natural way. To be sure, the great facts, the great mysteries of mortal life are never concealed; the folly, the pathos, the adventure, the tragedy of his career are freely and frankly set before us; the miraculous element,

however, is almost entirely wanting. There is nothing improbable in the whole story, nothing which faith or reason need question. Yet how often do we hear it said that the Old Testament is a mass of myths and marvels, that its strange and impossible and unbelievable miracles, the record of which almost entirely fills its pages, nullify themselves, and that, consequently, these ancient writings are obsolete as sources of legitimate ethical and spiritual instruction! The present sad neglect of the Old Testament is probably due, in a large measure, to some such miserable mistakes. True, it is an old book, dealing with the childhood of the race, relating the beginnings of God's revelation of His will and character, requiring the light of the New Testament for its interpretation; but all this does not warrant its neglect or misrepresentation. If it has its miracles, its obscurities, its difficulties, so has the New Testament; and the Church from which we receive the sacraments of Christ binds both Testaments together as the Word of God. In any case it will be safe to assume that no doubting criticism can object to the statement of the text that Jacob saw his ladder in a dream. We may even admit that the framework of his dream was suggested by the blocks of sandstone on the slopes of the hills where his eyes rested before he slept; that "his surroundings wove themselves" into the fabric of his dreams and that the slabs of stone on the sloping ascents of the hills "built themselves up into a gigantic staircase, reaching from the spot where he lay to the starry depths above him." It may have been so. At least all was natural as well as supernatural. But in that dream God spake to Jacob's soul.

2. "And behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven." In Jacob's ladder we have

the first clear intimation of the world to come. It was a revelation of the fact of a future life. He saw an open heaven and a way of ascent to that blessed abode. Henceforth Jacob knew that death does not end all. The vision also showed him that reconciliation is possible between God and sinful man. The gulf his sin had placed between himself and his God could be bridged over.

The many rounds or steps, one above another, in the long ascent would teach him that the upward way is toilsome and trying—that “heaven is not gained at a single bound.” Furthermore, the vision of earth joined to heaven could not fail to keep ever before him through the years to come high and pure ideals of a daily life that “slopes through darkness up to God.”

3. “And behold, the angels of God ascending and descending upon it.” It is easy to believe in the angelic world of which the Bible speaks. The seraphim and the cherubim and their radiant companions are a glorious creation readily pictured by the imagination and gladly welcomed by faith. It would be abnormal and contrary to all the laws of creation were the great spiritual space between God and man left tenantless and unbroken. In ordered and ever-ascending ranks of beauty, holiness, and power they rise from humanity to the Source of all creation; their nature and their loving occupation making them objects of the reverent admiration of every instructed and faithful Christian heart. An Apostle tells us that they are ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation; and our Lord said that the angels of His little ones do always behold the face of the Father in heaven. Accordingly in every age the Church has encouraged her children to believe in guardian angels

who are set apart for each of the baptized, to lift upwards our confessions and our prayers, to bring back our pardons and our blessings, guiding, guarding, encouraging us on earth, and at last bearing away the soul to God who gave it. "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways." The Collect for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels dwells especially upon the thought that the angels are the ministers of the providence of God in the government of this world, and that, in answer to our prayers, they succor and defend us on earth even as they always do God service in heaven. Jacob in his loneliness and banishment and misery would recognize in the angel host an assurance of the providential care of the Lord his God.

4. "And, behold, the Lord stood above" the ladder. While no man with his bodily eyes has seen God at any time, in his dream Jacob saw Him, saw Him above the ladder in an attitude of forgiveness and benediction. Thus the vision in full taught Jacob, first of all, that there was a Providence which would keep him in all his ways. That is the very first step in religion. To believe in One greater and higher than we, One who has the power and the will to save, to whom it may be said, Take me, for I am travel-stained and tired—that is the beginning and the ending also of all spiritual attainment. Jacob applied to himself the vision; it was for him; and from above he seemed to hear a voice pledging and promising him all blessedness which the dream ladder pictured out of the heavenly providence and the heavenly love.

If we, too, have learned the lesson of faith in Providence blessed are we, for to-day, as of old, it distinguishes the carnal from the spiritual, the believer from the unbeliever. That loving Providence makes all things work together

for good for all who love God. Oftentimes it does not seem so, and then we are tempted to murmur, tempted to take the familiar lines, "There is a Providence that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will," and, with the schoolboy, read over the punctuation mark, thus turning truth into falsehood, "There is a Providence that shapes our ends *rough*, hew them how we will." But God is our father and we are His children. He will take care of us. He provideth for all meat in due season. We are His jewels. We are as the apple of His eye.

5. There is something more. Jacob's ladder has a deeper meaning. Whether that deeper meaning was revealed to him in full or in part we know not; later on, however, devout Jews understood that the ladder was a type of the Messiah; and at length, in his conversation with Nathanael, the guileless man, as it is recorded in the closing verses of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, our Lord Himself interpreted the ladder as prefiguring the Incarnation of the Son of God. Christ is the true ladder that joins earth to heaven. By His two natures in One Person He is God and man — a ladder resting on earth and reaching heaven. In the opening of St. John's Gospel we have the inspired definition of the Incarnation, "The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us;" while St. Paul declares that like a ladder He bridges over the separation between earth and heaven, for there is "One mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

All, then, that Jacob's ladder meant for him it means for us. There is a heaven and its gates are open; angels come and go from earth to that heaven; there is a Father above who cares for us; and under His providential care we are safe; Christ is the one Mediator between men and

God. This old symbol of Christ shows Him to be perfect man and perfect God. Because He is man He is our brother and He can feel for us and we can follow His example; because He is God the Cross is an Atonement, and the open grave an Easter; and so an Apostle can say, "To you which believe He is *precious*."

THE PROMISE.

WEDNESDAY AFTER THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

“I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. . . . And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee.”—Gen. xxviii. 13, 14, 15.

IN his dream Jacob saw the Lord, or, according to another reading, the Glory of the Lord, revealed above the ladder. Then from the heavenly heights there fell upon his listening ear the gracious message from which the text is taken; a promise shaping all the after life of the listener, the Great Promise of the Old Testament and of the Jewish Covenant.

It was a four-fold promise.

1. In the first place it assured Jacob that he was the recognized heir of the birthright blessing. “I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.”

Hereafter the Covenant God will be known as the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the same Jehovah who is called in the New Testament the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises are yea and amen.

2. Again, he was promised a land, “the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.” And we know that this land did become the possession of the chosen family and of the chosen people, the Holy Land of the past and of the present, a picturesque and significant

type of the Promised Land beyond the grave and gate of death.

3. "And," continued the promise, "in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This is the Great Promise. The Promised One is here foretold. The Messiah shall be Jacob's son.

4. This clears the way for a somewhat fuller examination of the final promise of the text. In the plainest words a personal promise is now bestowed upon Jacob. "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee." When Jacob reached the hill-top whereon he should sleep, banished from home, in his loneliness, and fear, and sin, he may have felt that he was forsaken of God and man. He knew not his future and there seemed no present help in time of trouble. The thought of another despairing heart may have been his own,

"I am as a reed

Flung from the rock on ocean's foam to sail

Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's breath prevail."

Now, however, with this blessed promise his own, all was changed. Despair gave way to confidence and courage. "I am with thee; I will keep thee; I will not leave thee." Was this word of the Lord made good? Jacob himself bears witness to the faithfulness of the promises. Twenty years afterwards he says, "The God of my fathers hath kept me." "That testimony," says an eminent modern preacher, "I have read with great joy." Later on Jacob declares, "I will make an altar unto God who answered me in the day of my distress and was with me in the way where I went." When, on his dying bed,

he blessed the two sons of Joseph the same testimony was repeated, "The God which fed me all my life long, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads."

This personal promise made to Jacob the Scriptures warrant us in applying to ourselves. The same promise was afterwards made to Joshua, to Solomon, to all Israel; in the book of Isaiah it is repeated to the poor and needy; while in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle takes up the words, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," and gives them in all their fulness of comfort and hope to every troubled Christian heart. Everywhere in the Word of God the promises are emphasized and repeated. Under a thousand vivid images and in the plainest words we are assured over and over again that the Lord is faithful. The remarkable emphasis placed upon the promises of Holy Scripture is an evidence that they are in danger of being neglected; accordingly we find it to be a fact that the human heart is naturally distrustful of the promises of God. Nevertheless, Revelation assures us that the promises are founded upon the attributes of God. His promises are made voluntarily. Can He ever be reluctant to fulfil them? They were not given hastily or unadvisedly. No new circumstances can arise which are unforeseen, or which could on any account lead Him to wish to repeal them or to see that they should be repealed. He cannot be powerless to keep His word, for He is omnipotent. He can never promise beyond the limits of His power, beyond the scope of the laws by which His providence is governed, for He knows all and He cannot forget. The Lord must be faithful; and He is. He cannot deny Himself. He is not a man that He should lie, nor the

son of man that He should repent. His goodness faileth never; and Christian experience in every age and race and clime corroborates our faith. Every day it is put to the test that God is a prayer-hearing and a promise-keeping God. Multitudes of living men and women, some, if not all of us here this day, can testify that the Lord is faithful. All such believe in what are called special providences; but it is to be noticed that the promises of the text are equally fulfilled in the uneventful days. The young are usually eager for something to happen. As we advance in life, however, we gain the clearest and sweetest evidence of promises kept in the season when nothing happens. To awake after refreshing sleep and to see the brightness of the sun, to remember that all beneath our roof are well and happy, the children safe and in their places, no sickness, no harrowing cares, no separating ways, no crisis, no special anxiety for us or any of our own—on such mornings we should most devoutly acknowledge the blessed fulfilment of the old promise, “I will keep thee; I will be with thee; I will not leave thee,” and exclaim, with all thankfulness and sincerity,

“Oh, blest are uneventful days; and blest are uneventful years!”

But it will be strange if some of us are not now meeting the eventful days. For those days will come. Sometimes the believer's faith never wavers, carrying him safely through the period of changes and chances; most of us though, as we must admit, are besieged by doubts when the trial comes upon us and are prone to distrust the promise of God. Either our sins create the doubt, or to try us God hides His face, or else we fully realize the strength of our carnal nature only when it rebels against the heavenly discipline — from one or all of these

causes distrust seizes upon us; we doubt whether we have ever truly given our hearts to God. Gustav Flaubert, assigned by the literary critics a foremost place among the great modern masters of style, once said of himself, at the summit of his power, "I am growing so peevish about my writing, I am like a man whose ear is true but who plays falsely upon the violin,—his fingers refuse to reproduce precisely those sounds of which he has the inward sense. Then the tears come rolling down from the poor scraper's eyes and the bow falls from his hand." Where is the Christian who has not sometimes felt a similar despair? The great gap between the real and the ideal, both in faith and practice, tempts us to question our natural and sacramental endowment, even as the writer who cannot express his thought doubts his thought, or as the musician who cannot reproduce the sweet sounds within him doubts that inward sense and weeps over his doubt; just so the Christian who cannot live the life of Christ in bearing the Cross of Christ is sometimes tempted to doubt himself as well as the God above him. But Flaubert never gave up, and won success. And the Christian who holds fast to the promises in the day of darkness will see them fulfilled in the light. For the Lord is faithful. He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; neither should we forget that the goodness and faithfulness of God in keeping His word is, as Bishop Butler has most profoundly observed, "a truth full of terror for the wicked. Malice," he says, "may be wearied or satiated. Caprice may change; but goodness is a steady, inflexible principle of action."

"I am with thee; I will keep thee; I will not leave thee." This was the promise which caused the desert of

Jacob's hopelessness to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Let us make that promise our own. He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Believing that, and looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, knowing that He is faithful who has promised, we will fight the good fight, thankful for every promise fulfilled in the past, hopeful in present discouragements, brave and cheerful under temporary defeat, staying ourselves for every experience of life, death, and that vast forever, on the sweet assurance which evermore comes down the ladder of Divine love: "I am with thee; I will keep thee; I will not leave thee."

THE AWAKENING.

THURSDAY AFTER THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”—Gen. xxviii. 16, 17.

“DREAMS,” says Charles Dickens, “are the bright creatures of poem and legend, who sport on earth in the night season, and melt away in the first beam of the sun, which lights grim care and stern reality on their daily pilgrimage through the world.” But Jacob’s dream did not fade away. When he awoke the hard, cold light of early morning was uncovering the distant heights, the rock-strewn fields, and the wild brier of the wilderness; faded was the heavenly stairway, and faded the ascending and descending host, and faded the vision and the voice of God; but the memory of it, the touch Divine upon his soul remained. His first feeling is one of holy fear. “How dreadful is this place! The Lord is in this place and I knew it not.” There is nothing in these words to warrant the conjecture that hitherto Jacob had thought of God as a local deity, confined to his father’s habitation, and that his exclamation is an utterance of astonishment at the discovery that God was here and might be found anywhere. Jacob always knew that God was omnipresent. His words mean simply that that feeling was strong upon him which humanity has ever felt when it is brought near to the Creator and to the world un-

seen. The creature, since Adam's sin, and because of it, instinctively hides itself, as Adam did, from the approach of the Creator. And so the hill-top upon which he had slept seemed holy ground and a hushed awe fell upon Jacob. The reverence and godly fear of which the Apostle speaks filled his heart.

To-day, therefore, reverence shall be our theme. It will scarcely be denied that this is an irreverent age, or that we are an irreverent people. The subject may be an unwelcome one, but it is timely, and the duty of preaching upon it is imperative.

Now, what is reverence? In the text we see a fellow-man in a reverential mood, a sight better than the definitions which are not altogether satisfactory. We are told that reverence is a word by itself and that it has no synonym. It is not respect or fear or honor; *awe* is the nearest word; and yet it is more than awe. Dean Vaughan has well said, "We feel reverence only for the sacred—for that which is, or has touched, the Divine." Now the feeling to which Jacob gave expression on awakening will have, of course, its ebbs and flows. No attitude of the mind or heart is free from this law of change. But if we truly and rightly believe in God we must maintain a real reverence towards Him. If there is One in whom we live and move and are; to whom our hearts, our minds, and our consciences are an open book; upon whom we are absolutely dependent for all we have and love and hope for; who made us and not we ourselves—what innermost thought can we have of Him save this: Holy and Reverend is His name! Any serious consideration of the person and attributes of God, as revealed by Christianity, must force from us the prayer, "Hallowed be Thy name." Nevertheless, as we

look about us, we find that it is not so. Irreverence toward God may be charged against three classes of people.

There are those who openly scorn to pay Him reverence; who never bow the knee to Him, nor honor His holy name or His Word; who daily, even hourly, blaspheme Him, in heedlessness or in anger; who, when reminded of the pledge, "I will not hold him guiltless that taketh My name in vain," deny His power to reach them, or rashly proclaim their willingness to take the consequences—men who thus write themselves down in the lists of those "Who ne'er have tasted grace, nor goodness ever felt."

And many sin in this way who nevertheless profess and call themselves Christians. I do not refer to those who look upon our Lord merely as a great human teacher; or who, in other respects, are in error as to the nature and person of God. No doubt such are failing to give the homage which is due to Him. I speak, rather, of those about us who belong to what are known as the orthodox denominations. They are good people; they mean no harm; but they are so rude and free and familiar in their religion that it is impossible to approve of their ways. In order to escape even the suspicion of unfairness I will give the words of one of their own ministers. He had lived abroad for eight years, and upon his return published an article (*Homiletical Review*, Dec., 1888, page 546), from which the following sentences are taken: "A positively painful impression, upon coming home to America, was made by the lack of reverence during divine service. The behavior of the congregation, the bearing of the preacher, the sermon, the announcements, too often put divine services on the level of an entertain-

ment. Sometimes the entertaining feature is not only apparent, but actually announced as a special aim. As a consequence, the levity found in certain congregations ought not perhaps to be a surprise, however shocking it may be. When a minister descends to the sensational, the vulgar, the laughable, as the chief means of attracting an audience, we naturally wonder why he is in the pulpit. With such preaching astonishment ceases that the congregation lacks solemnity, is ready for a laugh, and can enter and leave the house of God without a thought or an act of worship." To this we may add that irreverence towards God is more than a question of taste, is more than bad manners; it is, wherever it is manifested by Christians, a serious hindrance to the progress of religion and a sin against the holiness of the Almighty.

Once more, we may treat God with irreverence by banishing Him from our thoughts, by neglecting to pray to Him, by rebelling against His will.

Take another thought. Our churches are holy. We should demean ourselves with reverence in the house of the Lord. Jacob turned his hill-top into a sanctuary and said, "This is none other but the house of God." Our blessed Saviour rebuked irreverence in the temple and He loved its courts. To teach us reverence our churches are designed to be and to seem unlike other structures. When we enter them we are in the shrine of an unseen presence, a meeting place between God and man. And the worship of our sanctuaries is profoundly reverent. No failure in this respect can be charged against the Book of Common Prayer. Of those outside our privileges it may be said that they do not know how to behave themselves when assembled for public worship,

but for Church people there is no such excuse. If we are not all on our knees, soberly and devoutly and audibly participating in the prayers, in each and every act and order of our worship, taking our part, endeavoring to banish all worldly thoughts, we are sinning against light and love, calling down upon ourselves a curse and not a blessing. Neither must we forget the power of example. The young, and all others, in fact, learn reverence by example rather than by precept. The devout example of one good man or woman is worth many sermons upon this duty. And with reverence for the house of God we shall grow to love His dwelling-place and its worship and be able to say with the Psalmist, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house and the place where Thine honor dwelleth."

We must also notice that Holy Scripture couples together reverence for the Lord's house and the Lord's Day. "Ye shall keep My sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary; I am the Lord." Here again, example is powerful. And so reverence, like the other religious sentiments, while it begins with God, descends to all the relations of life. Accordingly we are told, "Ye shall fear every man his father and his mother;" and again, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man and fear thy God." The wife, too, is taught to reverence her husband and the husband to love his wife. Says Ruskin: "Reverence is due to what is pure and bright in your own youth; to what is true and tried in the age of others; to all that is gracious among the living, great among the dead, and marvellous in the powers that can never die." If reverence in these respects dies out we shall be far on the road to materialism. And so the "great moral poet" sets forth reverence as the "angel

of the world." If we believe all this, if we realize that irreverence is in the daily air, that its logical and inevitable consequence is the certain destruction of the best ideals of mankind, if we must confess that

"in ports
Of levity no refuge can be found,
No shelter for a spirit in distress,"

then let us resolve to pray for the spirit of reverence, and diligently strive to be reverent before God, reverent in our sanctuaries, reverent in our homes, reverent in our attitude towards all that is pure and sacred; for God, who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, may be said to have forsaken us when we cease to respect the reverences, human and Divine.

THE VOW.

FRIDAY AFTER THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace ; then shall the Lord be my God.”—Gen. xxviii. 20, 21.

WHEN Jacob awoke he felt that he was on holy ground. While the reverential mood was still upon him he uttered the vow of the text. Such vows are as ancient as the race ; and to this day some instinct of the human heart prompts men of every religion to take upon themselves similar sacred engagements.

I. What, then, was the significance of Jacob's vow ? First of all we must notice what it was not. How often have we heard it said that Jacob is here driving a bargain with his Maker, that he is shrewdly defining his terms and conditions, and selling his worship for an equivalent, that in his vow we see clear indications of that commercial adroitness which has ever distinguished the nation whose founder Jacob was. A careless reading of our English version, without due consideration of the context, might give some sanction to this mistaken interpretation, “*If* God will be with me, and keep me, and feed me, *then* shall the Lord be my God.” The Hebrew, however, as the authorities, both ancient and modern, assure us, warrants no such construction. The word rendered “*if*” is equivalent to “*inasmuch*” or “*since*.” “*Since* God is going to be with me, and to keep me, and

give me all I need, and bring me back to my father's house in peace; since He has promised all this, and will assuredly perform it, I, for my part, pledge myself that He, and He alone, shall be my God, shall have my obedience, my worship, my trust, my adoration, and my love." If this utterance falls below the measure of that faith which enabled Job to say, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him," Jacob was nevertheless perfectly sincere, and his vision left a real and lasting impression upon his soul, an impression which finds its honest expression in the words of his vow.

2. This leads on to some consideration of the fact that we too are under vows. Is there one of us who cannot say with the Psalmist, "Thy vows are upon me, O God?" In Holy Baptism we pledged ourselves to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, to believe all the articles of the Christian Creed, and obediently to keep God's holy will and commandments. In Confirmation we voluntarily renewed these solemn vows and promises in the presence of all the people and knelt at the Apostle's feet for the gift of the Holy Spirit which should enable us so to do. In the Sacrament of the Altar we, from time to time, renew all these vows and pledge ourselves upon the Body and Blood of the Lord to continued faithfulness and loyalty. The very word *sacrament*, originally signifying a soldier's oath of allegiance to his leader, reminds us that in these holy rites we have pledged our word and honor to be loyal to our leader, the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. These vows are taken and imposed by sure and certain warrants of Holy Scriptures; they cover all we have and are; and our eternal future depends upon the earnestness of our efforts to keep these vows.

The Church also gives an Ordination and a Marriage vow. These vows are not demanded of all, nor of any, are entirely voluntary, and imposed only upon those who think they have vocation for these states of life. It is sometimes said that the Ordination vow is held to-day with less sincerity than in former years—a very grave charge which every clergyman is ready to disclaim for the great majority of his faithful brethren, while in his heart he fears for himself, and beseeches the people's prayers, lest having preached to others he himself become a cast-away. But we must admit, with shame and sorrow, that on every hand the Marriage vow is assumed lightly and unadvisedly and as lightly broken, even by those who know its sacredness. This deadly evil is growing rapidly and threatens our homes and our altars.

The Church has also, in all ages, encouraged her laity to take upon themselves vows of special devotion to her work and worship. Brotherhoods, sisterhoods, guilds, and an order of deaconesses exist, do noble and loyal work and need recruits. At present there seems to be an urgent need for more such women workers; and it must be that in many of our parishes there are young women who have generous gifts for such a blessed work; who, perhaps, need only a word of encouragement to lead them to enter upon it.

3. The human heart, however, has never seemed satisfied without vows beyond those already mentioned, vows made when some crisis is at hand. And most of those vows are neither wise nor righteous. For example, a vow may promise that which is in itself sinful, as when the conspirators among the Jews "bound themselves under a curse that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul." To all such "hot and peevish vows"

not only are "the gods deaf," but against them is kindled the wrath of the God of all gods. Or, a vow may be free from sin and yet stupid and senseless, as when a man binds himself not to cut his hair or beard until a certain politician is elected President of the United States. Or, a vow may be religious and yet foolish, as when a Christian undertakes that which is impossible; never again, for instance, to have a wicked thought. Such "mouth-made vows which break themselves" in vowing are vain and empty, and probably impertinent. But perhaps the most common form of a wrong vow is the one with which Jacob has been unjustly charged; when men, consciously or unconsciously, try to bargain with God, engaging to do something to compensate for past sins or negligences, offering to give Him something or to do something for Him if He will give them in return their heart's desire. "If God will spare my child's life," we say, "I will promise to attend Church every Sunday and become a regular communicant; if God will save me from this disgrace, or ward off this business failure, or this personal humiliation; if God will give me this or that blessing; then I, for my part, will promise to give or do this or that for Him." The Saxon Priest of Odin, when he listened to the Christian missionary, Paulinus, gave expression to the same thought, exclaiming: "The old gods have profited me little; these long years have I served them, no man more diligently, and yet many are richer and more prosperous than I am. I will try the new." We are told that in Mexico a gambler will sometimes place a picture of the Virgin on the table, vowing to her so many candles or dollars if she will win for him; and, if he loses, will sometimes, in a burst of rage, draw his knife and hack in pieces the picture of his divinity. We smile and

sigh complacently over such miserable Christianity as this; and yet, in a subtler form we often yield to this same error. Even Abraham Lincoln was thus ensnared. Before a certain battle Mr. Lincoln vowed that if the Confederates were defeated he would emancipate the slaves. And into such vows as this the best of us may be beguiled. Now, how and why was Lincoln's vow wrong? Because it was not a true vow but an offered bargain. If after he had prayed and fought, God had answered and helped and given him victory, then he might have righteously vowed his vow, "Since God has helped me to defeat the foe I will free the slaves."

"And when thou vowest a vow," says the Scripture, "defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools; pay that thou hast vowed." But we all know how thankfulness for answered prayer soon fades and that convalescents have short memories. It will be strange if many of us are not under true and binding vows made in the past for answered prayers. Let us pay our vows and cherish our gratitude. Ingratitude is base. Furthermore, our word was pledged. We take pride in being as good as our word. A promise to a fellow-mortal we regard as sacred. And is God less than mortal man? Can we break our word to Him without dishonor? And you have given Him your word of honor. At a time when your heart overflowed with gratitude or was aflame with love you vowed, "Now shall the Lord be my God." Do you remember, while you listen, some such vow of the past? Consider, then, that the merciful Lord who heard your vow grieves over your neglect and dishonor; and, it may be, is sending this present message to your soul in order to shame you back to your honor and win His wandering child to His heart once more.

If you heed not His message of love, by and by, but
still in love, He will make you feel the weight of His rod.

THE ALTAR.

SATURDAY AFTER THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

"This stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house."—Gen. xxviii. 22.

THOSE who have seen Rubens's great picture of Jacob's Ladder-vision in Antwerp Cathedral will never forget the ideal beauty of the young patriarch's face. The painting is a blaze of glorious light. The stone pillow shines like a lamp of gold in the radiance. The ladder and the angels are marvels in design and execution. But in the rapture of the sleeper's face the genius of the painter has its chief expression. Think, then, of the look on Jacob's face when he awoke. What painter could reproduce the countenance of one whose soul was filled with awe, gratitude, and faith, the countenance of a true worshipper?

Yesterday we considered the vow which now passed Jacob's lips; since God has promised to be with him and keep him and never leave him, Jacob is resolved that the Lord shall be his God. The narrative to-day brings before us three particulars in connection with his act of worship on awakening from his dream.

1. First, he "took the stone that he had put for his pillow and set it up for a pillar and poured oil upon it." This oil, in a small skin bag, he may have carried as a medicine, or possibly for food in some necessity. We know that he left his father's dwelling with only the scantiest provision for his journey. In later times the

prophets, in order to rebuke the proud and haughty spirit of the Jews, reminded them that "a Syrian ready to perish was their father;" while Jacob himself tells us that when he crossed the Jordan the staff he brought from home was his sole earthly possession. And yet, although his present provision for making an external act of worship was very meagre, he had no thought of deferring his devotions to a more convenient season. He would consecrate himself to the service of God now, while the impulse to do so was strong upon him. Though he had no sacrificial victim to offer, he reverently made use of such symbols as he could command and worshipped God in spirit and in truth. He set up for an altar the stone which had been his pillow while he dreamed. It may have been a meteoric stone bearing outward evidences of its heavenly origin. It may have been the Stone of Scone now under the Coronation Chair in the Chapel of St. Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey. The stone which had been his pillow Jacob turned into an altar. He would commemorate the Divine communication and remind others who should see it that God had visited this spot. And whenever Jacob met with a special revelation or dispensation of the good providence of God he set up a stone as a memorial. "Blessed, thrice blessed is the man, to whom life is," as it was to Jacob, "dotted over with memorials of communion with God." What those rude altars of old did for the patriarch, memory does for us. "I too," says a holy man, "remember with gratitude the places where I have found God near, the saints by whom He has spoken to me, the occasions of comfort and peace which He has sent; as long as memory lasts, I would preserve these with gratitude."

2. Again, Jacob “called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.” Luz means an almond tree; Bethel, the house of God. Afterwards, perhaps with reference to this event, in the temple, the branches of the golden candle-stick, a figure of the Church, were to have knobs of almonds, and the sacerdotal rod of Aaron budded with almonds. So whenever doubt is turned into faith, repentance into forgiveness, Luz becomes Bethel, and the grove of almonds is transformed into the house of God.

It was a good instinct which led Jacob to seek to perpetuate the sacred impression of the moment. There is a spiritual value in the forms and ceremonies of religious worship; impressions and excited feelings are transient and will fade away unless they are turned into some fixed and permanent mould which shall give the spirit a form for its home. It is sometimes said that “religion is an inward thing, that it does not consist in church-going, keeping the Lord’s Day, public worship, sacraments, and so forth, but is only a state of the spirit.” And yet we all know that if we neglect these outward observances our religion withers and dies. Human nature requires the aid of these external reminders of the great facts and duties of Christianity. The Holy Communion alone is a monument which keeps forever before the eyes and ears of the faithful the leading events in the life of our blessed Saviour, while His Body and His Blood, given and received, sustain and strengthen the spirit of the worshipper.

Jacob said, “This pillar shall be God’s house.” St. Paul interprets and applies these words to the Church of Christ, which he calls “Bethel, the house of God,” “the Church of the living God; the pillar and ground of the truth.”

3. But there is something more. Jacob is resolved to honor God with his substance—"Of all that Thou give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." The instinctive feeling that an altar demands an offering is approved by many passages of Holy Scripture. But the feeling comes of itself. "O ye Corinthians," says the Apostle, "our heart is enlarged." That is an experience which repeats itself every time the heart is opened to God. Expansion and expression is a law of spiritual growth. The Dead Sea is dead because it has no outlet. It is always receiving and never giving. Nevertheless the failure of Christians generally to fulfil the reasonable requirements of God in offerings and gifts and sacrifices is a deplorable fact. Under the changed conditions of modern society the precise proportion named by Jacob may not be, in all cases, the Christian requirement. In some instances we are told that it is impossible; in many others it would be too easy a demand, for to many the tenth of the income would mean no sacrifice at all. For most of us it would undoubtedly be a wise rule to make the tenth the standard of our giving, with the conviction that that proportion is our just due and that all we give in addition thereto may be regarded as a free-will offering. Do we not know that all we have is derived from God? Is He not the giver of every good and perfect gift? "Both riches and honor come of Thee, O Lord." The very coins we handle have stamped upon their face, "In God we trust." Furthermore, our lives also are in His hands. "He giveth life and health to all things." How are we recognizing and meeting these obligations? Are none of us generous, nay, extravagant, towards self, niggardly towards God? Are there not communicants who pay more for a single article of personal adornment

or apparel than they pay for their pew, more than they ever give to missions? The Scriptures abound in warnings against the perversion of God's gifts. "Take heed and beware of covetousness." "If riches increase set not your heart upon them." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." "Your gold and silver is cankered and the rust of them shall eat your flesh as it were fire." "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give and glad to distribute." From such passages as these it appears that even if our offerings were not needed for the altar of Christ, the necessity of giving as an antidote for selfishness would still remain. In His mercy God has placed in our hands the medicine which alone can heal that deadly disease of greed. And so, if the love of money is the root of all evil, the right use of it in God's sight is a source of virtue and joy and peace.

To encourage Christian beneficence Holy Scripture, therefore, gives precious promises of temporal care and spiritual prosperity to the liberal giver. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thine increase; so shalt thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." "The liberal man deviseth liberal things and by liberal things shall he stand. The liberal soul shall be made fat." "To do good and to distribute forget not; for with such sacrifices God is

well pleased." "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

When Jacob ended his act of worship he departed, or literally, as it is in the margin of our Bible, "When Jacob lifted up his feet." His feet were light, for joy was in his heart. He had the assurance for which our Collect prays that he would be defended from all adversities which might happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which might assault and hurt the soul. At the Christian altar we too may lay down our burdens and go on our way rejoicing.

SERVING FOR RACHEL.

MONDAY AFTER THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”—
Gen. xxix. 18, 20.

IN this chapter we see Jacob preserved from Esau's anger, escaping from the perils of his long journey, and safe at last in the home of Laban his mother's brother. And here he finds Rachel. The God who met him on the way and opened heaven to his wondering gaze has been with him and kept him as He promised.

Now when we recall the circumstances which led to Jacob's exile from the Holy Land one fact stands out with significant distinctness. It is the providence by which God saved him from the murderous revenge of his brother. Esau said in his heart, “I will slay my brother!” For years Esau has despised spiritual things, living for self and the senses only. Gradually he has deteriorated. For,

“Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how mean a thing is man!”

Now he has become wicked enough to desire the life of the playmate of his earliest years, his only brother. Yet there is one tender memory in his heart and that restrains his hand; he thinks of the blind old man reclining in yonder tent, so near his earthly end, and he shrinks from

grieving his father by this deed of blood. So he puts off his purpose. "I will wait," he says, "till my father dies in peace; then vengeance shall be mine." But that delay saved Jacob's life. It is often so with us. How many evil intentions fall to the ground like unripened buds in a heavy gale! How many evil deeds that men design, which would fill the world with horror and despair, never find accomplishment! The would-be murderer creeps to the side of the sleeper's bed, lifts his hand to strike the blow of death, when something in that calm face reminds him of his own mother as she lay dead, and he creeps hastily away with the fear of the unseen upon him; and the victim lives out his years. We cannot measure or imagine what the world is saved of misery by this operation of what is naturally good in us upon what is naturally bad. We may call it the restraint of our better selves upon our evil selves. It is true that the wide continents are already filled with the woe which follows in the wake of sin; but what would the world be if, added to all this evil, there were the vast and incalculable number of crimes which men intended to carry out but are somehow restrained from; if, in a word, the evil designs of all human hearts could grow into deeds?

The proverb that there is "a soft spot" in every heart is founded upon fact. Esau loved his father, and that tenderness in his wild nature delayed and finally defeated his purpose. But if Jacob escaped death he was not to escape the penalty of that wrong which angered Esau. His punishment began at once in his banishment from home and lasted until guile was beaten down within his soul.

His long journey at length draws near its end. One morning Jacob reaches a well where are some shepherds

with their sheep. The traveller at once begins to question them. An old commentator remarks that no one need be above asking questions and that often our failure to ask them leaves us ignorant of much interesting and important information. He learns from these men that his uncle lives in the neighborhood, a leading citizen, and that, according to their custom, they are waiting till all the flocks are gathered together before they open the well. "And here," exclaims one of them, "comes Rachel, Laban's daughter, with the sheep."

As soon as Jacob sees his beautiful cousin drawing near, possibly for the purpose of attracting her favorable attention, at least with the desire of rendering her a service of gallantry, he takes upon himself the task of several men, and putting forth all his manly strength, rolls the "great stone" away from the well's mouth and gives water to Rachel's flock. Then he makes himself known, embraces Rachel, and weeps for joy.

In passing notice how, in this turning-point of his life, Jacob's character as a shepherd appears. No sooner did he see the thirsty sheep gathered about the unopened well than he longed to have them watered and led out to the green pastures. All his life long he kept and cared for the sheep; and in this respect, as in many others, he pointed forward to that Redeemer who was the Good Shepherd of mankind.

In Laban's home Jacob remained for a month as a visitor. His uncle soon discovered that his youthful kinsman possessed a thorough mastery of the shepherd's calling, and he was eager to secure his services for a term of years. In what follows, a true Eastern pastoral, unsurpassed in beauty and pathos by the later classics, we shall want to hear once more the charming words of the

old narrative itself: "And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favored. And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

Laban's proposition opened the way for Jacob to declare his love; and, as he had no dower to offer, he eagerly grasped the opportunity to propose for her this long term of personal service. And these years, we are told, seemed short because of his great love. There are other human passions,—hate, avarice, fear, ambition,—which have held men constant to long, laborious tasks, but love alone could make the time seem short. It is easy to believe that these seven years while the child Rachel became a woman were the happiest days of Jacob's chequered life. Every reader sees clearly that his constant love for Rachel is one of the marked things in his career. That love never wavered, and her name was on his dying lips. Coleridge has said, "No man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel." The saying may be true; but we shall quite miss the meaning of his life if we admit that there can be any question of his "goodness." He was accepted of God. He was a spiritual man. His history is the story of the conflict between his higher and his lower natures and the slow but final victory of the spirit over the flesh.

We are to see, therefore, in the great disappointment of his affections not only a merited punishment but also a Divine discipline. How often does the old saying come true that God pays us in our own coin! So in the present instance we see the deceiver deceived and the cheat cheated. When the seven years' service ended the marriage feast was prepared. Then the heartless Laban took his weak-eyed elder daughter, and disguising her beneath the ample veil which custom demanded for a bride, substituted her for her younger sister Rachel. When Jacob discovered the fraud he did not repudiate the marriage. He submitted with what Martin Luther calls "superhuman patience." With a breaking heart he acknowledged to himself that the measure he had meted out to others was now meted to him again — that in this thing God was seeking to make all trickery and guile odious to him forever. What Rachel said and thought is not recorded. When Laban saw that Jacob was ready to sacrifice his love and the labor of years to the claims of religion, this avaricious and unfatherly father proposed that he should also marry Rachel and serve him yet seven other years for her. Polygamy, while not unusual or unlawful, was virtually forced upon Jacob. It speaks much for him that he did not himself propose or demand a second marriage. And so Jacob continued to serve for Rachel for seven additional years.

This discipline was good for Jacob's soul. By this means the doubleness, indirection, prevarication, naturally so strong in him, was beaten down and kept under.

Let us too submit thankfully to the chastisement of the Lord. If we have made the great choice, all that is laid on us is designed to make us loathe our sins, to lift

up our hearts, and to guide our feet into the paths of righteousness and peace. As has been said: "God delights to see grace in us at all times; but He loves not to see it latent. He desires it to be in exercise. And in order to bring it into exercise He uses the instrumentality of suffering. The leaves of the aromatic plant shed but a faint odor, as they wave in the air. The gold shines scarcely at all as it lies hid in the ore. The rugged crust of the pebble conceals from the eye its interior beauty. But let the aromatic leaf be crushed; let the ore be submitted to the furnace; let the pebble be cut and polished; and the fragrance, the splendor, the fair colors are then brought out:"—

" This leaf ? This stone ? It is thy heart :
It must be crushed by pain and smart,
It must be cleansed by sorrow's art—
Ere it will yield a fragrance sweet,
Ere it will shine, a jewel meet
To lay before thy dear Lord's feet."

THE RETURN.

TUESDAY AFTER THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

“I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me ; now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.”—Gen. xxxi. 13.

IN the story of the fourteen years of Jacob's service for Rachel there is nothing set down to his discredit. To Laban, his father-in-law, he was a faithful servant. He served God, too, with all his heart. His untiring industry, his intelligent supervision of every detail of his work, his masterful yet kindly rule over his keepers and dependants, his gifts of management and organization, and his keen daily oversight of all his business, speedily won its reward, and the flocks under his care thrived and multiplied. Laban's chief shepherd in a few years made his master a rich man. As the seasons passed the vision at Bethel was ever with him, his occupation was congenial and arduous, his children grew up under his own eye, the constant example of his tricky father-in-law helped to make guile, his besetting sin, odious ; while the childlessness of his beloved Rachel was, perhaps, the only shadow over these toilsome yet healthful and blessed years.

It is true that the polygamy which was almost forced upon him produced its inevitable harvest of jealousies and heart-burnings. In that early age of the world, however, it was often the least of many evils, and in the present instance seems to have been tolerated, even approved of God, who brought good out of the evil. The

early Christian fathers, who were almost contemporary with the Apostles, dwell at length upon the spiritual and mystical meaning of this portion of the patriarch's life. According to these holy men of old, Jacob, the son blessed of his father, who became a pilgrim, an exile, a shepherd and a servant, for the sake of Rachel whom he loved, is a type of Jesus Christ. Rachel, whose name signifies a "sheep," represents the lost sheep Christ loved and suffered for that they might become a Church "Espoused to Himself in mystical wedlock, by His blessed Word and Sacraments," purchased with His own precious blood. Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Ambrose saw also in Jacob's twelve sons, heads of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, born of different mothers, "a foreshadowing that all spiritual Israelites derive their life from Christ. Jacob loved Rachel and his design was to have one, and only one, wife. So in Christ's will and desire, there is one Catholic Church, from the beginning to the end of the world. But all that is human is marred by blemishes and sullied by stains of sin. Still God's purposes are not overthrown; Christ is the one author and giver of spiritual grace wheresoever it flows. Leah was clandestinely introduced into wedlock with Jacob. Rachel was not exempt from envy and jealousy; so the Church in this world has many spots and wrinkles of human infirmities. Separate congregations are consequences of her sin and barrenness. But wheresoever Christians are born, whether it be at Jerusalem or Samaria, whether it be in the unity of the Church, or in schismatical sects, all their spiritual life, all their spiritual grace, all their hopes of blessing from God, are derived from Him who became a physician, a servant and a shepherd for their sakes; the true Jacob—the promised

seed of Abraham, the ever blessed son, Jesus Christ." In such a winning way did the first Christian teachers combine sound Church doctrine with the charity and balance learned from those who had seen Christ.

When Joseph was born Jacob seems to have regarded him as the heir of promise. About this time, too, his second term of service came to an end. The way appeared open for his return with Joseph to the land of promise; and so he said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place and to my country." Laban, alarmed at the prospect of losing the man whose skill had enriched him, at once acknowledges his obligations to Jacob, even owning that the Lord had blessed him for Jacob's sake, and offers to pay his nephew from that time forth his own price. "Appoint me thy wages," says Laban, "and I will give it." It is clear that the crafty old man had never read what was written behind the calm and patient eyes of his son-in-law. He said to himself, "I have cheated and managed him for fourteen years; it will be easy to keep him in my power." When Jacob, therefore, accepted the offer and proceeded to name his terms for another period of service, Laban with difficulty could restrain or conceal his greedy joy as he promptly closed the bargain. He had expected, as a matter of course, to get the advantage of his simple and pious relative, but he scarcely had counted on doing it so speedily and entirely. And what was Jacob's proposition? He agreed to serve a third seven years, not for payment in money, but on condition of receiving for his own all the spotted, speckled, brown, and ringstraked animals the flocks of Laban might produce; while, to begin with, Laban was to be permitted to remove to a place three miles away all animals which were not already pure white.

The young man seemed determined to cheat himself. Evidently he had no head for business. Laban's prompt acceptance of the offer shows that he was an utterly avaricious and unscrupulous man.

On the other hand, when we attempt to analyze Jacob's motives in proposing these terms we meet with considerable difficulty. We know he was not the simple and unsophisticated youth he seemed to Laban. We must remember that he had a keen and strong mind. He had become, too, the most skilful shepherd in all the land. He put brains into his work. He knew what was going on. What, then, was the outcome of this bargain? Jacob's flocks and herds increased almost miraculously, and he was soon a master and prosperous proprietor on his own account. Jacob himself tells us that God blessed him, gave him skill, and enriched him, and that the artifices he employed were revealed to him in a dream. But the commentators are not agreed upon this point. Some say, "He sets himself to secure the very wealth which God had promised to bestow upon him, by base and crooked means;" that "we might as soon sprinkle rose-water on a sewer as attempt to justify Jacob's morality;" that he even "uses religious language to conceal his duplicity." On the contrary, the more conservative and accepted authorities assure us that "there was nothing fraudulent whatever in what Jacob did." The truth lies probably between these two extremes. Jacob knew he was dealing with a rogue, and the natural man in him, the crafty man, loving indirection and doubleness, and loving money, rose up to meet the cunning opposed to him. "It was diamond cut diamond." The Jacob-nature, subdued by the vision at Bethel, was not dead, and, in this congenial air, revived. We know not what

inward battles he fought against selfishness and guile; we know only that each one of us has the same enemy, called self within, and that we must each plead to God with all our might:

“ God harden me against myself,
This traitor with pathetic voice
Which craves for ease, and rest, and joys;
Myself arch-traitor to myself,
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go.”

At length Laban's sons became jealous of Jacob and accused him of dishonesty. Laban himself was suspicious and envious; and Jacob “ beheld the countenance of Laban, and behold, it was not toward him as before.” These troubles evidently led Jacob to his prayers and meditations, for soon he seemed to hear a voice speaking in his ear the words of the text: “ I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst a pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: arise, get thee out of this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.” And Jacob obeyed the call.

Notice the significance of the expression, “ I am the God of Bethel.” He is reminded of the place where his heart was touched and where he made his vow. These words seemed to say to him, “ I am the same Divine Friend who met you in your sins and forgave you; I am the promise-keeping God; I have not forsaken you; I have kept you; I am with you. I am the God of those early mercies; I saved you then; I have saved you many times since; what I have been to you is the pledge and assurance of what I will be to you. At Bethel also you vowed to be Mine, saying, The Lord shall be my God. Forget not that you are Mine.”

God speaks likewise to each one of us: "At the altar you too vowed before men and angels that you would love and serve Me to the end. Keep that vow. I will help you keep it, and save you in spite of yourself."

THE PURSUIT.

WEDNESDAY AFTER THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Mizpah; for he said, The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.”—Gen. xxxi. 49.

IN the twenty-first year of his exile Jacob is summoned to return to the land of promise. Fourteen of these years he served for Rachel and the time seemed short because of the great love wherewith he loved her. In the last seven years, free to gather the earthly goods his heart craved, he became a rich man. His flocks and herds increased so rapidly, almost miraculously, that Laban, his father-in-law, influenced by the accusations of his sons, brothers of Rachel and Leah, was jealous of Jacob's success and doubtful of his honesty: “And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban that it was not toward him as before.” We are told that Jacob not only noticed the changed demeanor of Laban but also that he “heard the words of Laban's sons.” Some report of the accusations these young men were making was brought to Jacob's ears. What others are saying of us—how few can hear that with indifference! How often has some such report determined our own course of action!

The discord about him, therefore, and the suspicions, joined, perhaps, to the pricking of conscience within, led Jacob to accept with prompt obedience the Divine summons to depart and seek once more the land of his birth, the land of promise. As usual, however, he acts deliberately. He makes his plans beforehand and is ready

to take advantage of every favorable circumstance. So when his father-in-law gathered all his family and dependants for the annual sheep-shearing at a place three days' journey from Jacob's habitation he decided that the time for his flight was at hand. He placed his wives and children, eleven sons and one daughter, "upon camels, and carried away all his cattle and all his goods; and stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian. So he fled with all that he had." He took all that belonged to him, but nothing more. Rachel, his wife, however, without her husband's knowledge, "had stolen the images that were her father's." Rachel's theft of these images or "teraphim," as they are called in the margin of our Bible, shows that she had not entirely freed herself from the semi-idolatrous faith and practices in which she had been reared. Possibly she wished to prevent Laban from discovering by the aid of his gods the direction of Jacob's flight; probably she wished to consult them herself should danger come upon the fugitives; perhaps, as has been conjectured, she coveted the silver or gold of which the gods were made.

For ten days Jacob has continued his journey in safety. He has placed at least three hundred miles between himself and Laban. He is nearing the borders of the Holy Land. Bethel, where twenty years ago the God of his fathers had spoken to his soul, is not far off.

As he journeyed his thoughts would range over the gracious providences which had gone before and followed him through all the years. He would perceive that his growing riches were endangering his spiritual life; that he had been doing that foolish thing most of us have sometimes done, barring God out of his life with God's own gifts; making his inward life like

“The pleached bower
Where honeysuckles, ripened by the sun
Forbid the sun to enter.”

One other thought must have been often with Jacob on his way to meet the God of Bethel, the thought of his own personality. He knew that he was the same man who was once in Bethel long ago; that he had preserved his identity, had retained his self-conscious memory. John Stuart Mill has truly said, “The mind might be regarded as a mere series of feelings . . . were it not for the memory.” And so when Jacob remembered that twenty years previously he had seen the Ladder-vision at Bethel, in that recollection his keen intellect would note at least three things: first, the fact remembered; second, the mind which remembered the fact; and third, the certainty that the mind which remembered the fact was the same mind as that which experienced the fact. The permanence of his soul, or self, his abiding personality, would assert itself. He was the same man. But could that self be the body, or of the body? No, for the body changes, and we have many bodies. Could it be the brain? Even the materialists themselves confess the impossibility of storing up the contents of a human memory, the record of all that has been seen, heard, felt, thought, and read, “in three pounds’ weight of albuminous and fatty tissue.” The mind, the soul, the self, uses the body as its instrument, but is itself living, never-dying, conscious and self-conscious and eternal. As he journeyed homeward Jacob thought of these things.

In the meantime Laban is in hot pursuit of the fugitives. With a force of armed men, on swift dromedaries, carrying only necessities, on the tenth day he overtook Jacob’s

slow-moving company in Gilead. Here, his prey securely snared, he encamped for needed rest. On the morrow he would wreak his vengeance and recover his stolen goods and his cattle. But that night the God of Jacob visited Laban in a dream, warning him that he must do his kinsman no harm; an admonition which, with a strange mixture of faith and superstition, he feared to disregard. In the morning, when the two leaders met, Laban preferred his charges against Jacob, and demanded the restoration of his gods. He reminds his nephew that he is in his power and informs him that were it not for his dream he would not stand parleying but at once proceed to right these wrongs. Jacob replies with his usual astuteness, passing lightly but frankly over the main charge. He acknowledges that he slipped away secretly; but this, he says, was due to fear—he was afraid Laban would not let him go, or would compel him to leave his family and his goods behind him. Upon the accusation of the theft of the teraphim, however, in ignorance of Rachel's act, he waxes eloquent, denying the crime and boldly demanding a search. The search begins. Each tent is examined without result. At last the searchers reach Rachel's temporary dwelling, where, we are told, she had the images concealed beneath a camel's saddle. If little Joseph, playing about, had with sharp eyes discovered his mother's secret, he did not betray her. When the searchers entered, Rachel at once showed herself to be her father's daughter and no novice in craft, as, without the slightest manifestation of concern, she reclined upon the saddle and asked her father to excuse her from rising to receive him, as she was indisposed; whereupon, after looking elsewhere about the tent in vain, Laban was compelled to acknowledge Jacob's innocence and to

take a milder tone. Then Jacob, with growing self-confidence, indignant at what he believed to be a trumped-up charge, "unpacks his heart in words": "And Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found?" For "twenty years have I been with thee" keeping thy flock. "That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee" to escape payment for it; "I bore the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. . . . Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" in the dream. Laban could not deny the truth of this outburst of natural eloquence, and, softened perhaps by the sight of his children and grandchildren, agreed to let him go on condition that he should enter into a covenant to deal kindly with his wives and children and never return to Padan-aram to trouble him any more. So an altar was set up, each swore to the covenant by his God, and they called the place "Mizpah"—"The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another."

To-day let us meditate upon the words in which Jacob describes his good care of Laban's sheep. "That which was torn of beasts I brought not to thee; I bore the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it." In the same way our Good Shepherd has made Himself answerable for us even when torn by the enemy. Jacob never

wearied in "the day the drougt consumed" him, reminding us of Him who sat down at Jacob's well enduring thirst that He might give living water to one lost sheep there, rather than be served by taking the earthly water from her hand. "The frost" was thick upon me "by night," says Jacob, "and my sleep departed from mine eyes;" and we think of Him who rose before the day to pray, and who, stripped and bleeding, shivered with the cold on the night of His passion. May that Good Shepherd evermore guard and bless and keep us all!

JACOB'S PRAYER.

THURSDAY AFTER THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

“Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau : for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.”—Gen. xxxii. 11.

THE thirty-second chapter of Genesis is one of the great chapters in the life of the patriarch Jacob. It gives us Mahanaim, Jabbok, and Peniel, the angel host, the prayer by the fords, and the wrestling with the Nameless One in the night. Jacob's temporal as well as his spiritual history here begins anew. His prayer, from which the text is taken, is one of the most familiar and helpful passages in the Bible. To-day let us consider the events which preceded and called forth his prayer, and then hear the prayer itself.

1. After an exile of twenty years Jacob is returning to the land of promise. He left home with nothing but his staff in his hand ; fourteen years he served for Rachel ; then he made a bargain with Laban, his father-in-law, to work for a certain portion of the profits ; and in these last years he accumulated a fortune and “ increased exceedingly and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels and asses.” But while he grew rich in worldly goods his spiritual life declined. His vision at Bethel long years ago did not, as we see, make him perfect ; his conversion, the touch of God upon his soul, did not entirely exterminate the roots of evil within him. If it had he would not have been like one of us.

At length God called him to arise and to return to his native land. In parting from his father-in-law, which he succeeded in doing with some difficulty and danger, Jacob left behind him a "magnified image of himself." In this man his own besetting sin of guile was ever before him in its most unlovely aspects, that he might learn to see all its baseness; and "the sight of his own faults writ large in the coarser texture of Laban's character" seems to have been a living lesson which was not set before him in vain.

2. With his caravan Jacob pushed on to the southward, and not far from the borders of the Holy Land pitched his camp for a short but needed rest. Here in the night a vision of angels appeared to him, the same angels, no doubt, who visited him in his Ladder-dream; and he said, "This is God's host, and he called the name of that place Mahanaim." Full of comfort and encouragement was this visitation, for it assured him that he was under the Divine protection, and that as he had just escaped from Laban so he would also be brought safely through the danger which threatened in his approaching meeting with his brother Esau.

To meet angels on our way to our own land is symbolical of reaching degrees of holiness. It means that our virtues are revealing themselves to us; that growth in grace is realized in its ripening. There are seasons in the life of the believer when a discipline which has been going on in the soul for a greater or lesser length of time bears fruit. We have been growing better and better and knew it not. We have been gaining strength and only felt our weakness. We have been in grief and sorrow and knew not that suddenly we were to find a light arising out of the darkness. Then in some hour of

danger, when some Esau from out a long-forgotten past emerges, or some great difficulty seems about to overwhelm us, the power of good in the recent discipline of events gathers up its strength, and lo! we behold in it an angel. It trembles into visibility. It takes on the smile of the morning. It points and beckons heavenward. It holds on high the shield of our defence. It sweeps the chilly earth with its warm and roseate wings. We are consoled; we are visited with comforts from above. We lift up our hearts and say, "This is God's host. In God will I rejoice; yea in God's word will I comfort me." We are continually growing better if we are religious; if we live lives of faith and prayer; if we dwell in Christ and Christ dwells in us; if we daily endeavor ourselves to follow the blessed steps of His most holy life. The discipline of a well-kept Lent may reveal itself thus to us in the near future, and growth in grace be realized in its ripening.

3. As we go on with the story we see that a man who has learned to pray is equal to any emergency which can possibly arise. The messengers Jacob has sent forward return with the report that from the tents of Esau four hundred armed men are advancing. The crisis is upon him. The great sin of his youth, the sin of deceiving his father and cheating his brother, will not down; it has dogged him all his life; and now Jacob must meet it face to face and vanquish or be vanquished. Notice that he does not lose his self-possession. When these evil tidings fall upon him his heart standeth fast. His keen mind at once recognizes the hopelessness either of retreat or of resistance, and so he calls upon his God. But he thinks and acts as well as prays.

In the first place he sends his brother a message of

kindness and peace. Then he sends him valuable presents, anticipating the wisdom of Solomon that "a man's gift maketh room for himself" and "pacifieth anger." Then he follows kindness with prudence, dividing his company into two bands, with the hope that if worse comes to worst one band at least in the darkness and confusion may escape the fury of the avenger. Having exhausted his own resources Jacob leaves the issue with God. In his behavior at this time he sets us an excellent example. This truly religious man is no fanatic. He prays, and his prayer is a perfect model of supplication; but he also thinks and acts. He does not imagine that prayer can take the place of prudence any more than that prudence can take the place of prayer. He gives no encouragement to those who in sickness reject physicians and medicine and rely upon faith alone. Notice, too, that he does not ask or expect God to deliver him by destroying Esau and his men; he asks only for some providential stirring of better memories or better thoughts which may turn his brother from his evil purpose. And so in this story of Jacob's danger we find working together to a happy end kindness, prudence, and prayer. Let us mark the value of the three working together; for if in all our difficulties, trials, and misunderstandings with others, we also exercise the three, we shall usually find a happy issue out of all.

4. This leads on to the words of Jacob's prayer. A prayer, "the combined beauty and power, humility and boldness, brevity and comprehensiveness of which" has been universally recognized. "And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not

worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." And Jacob's prayer was answered. God appeased Esau. The next morning when Esau awoke, lo! his purpose of revenge had vanished.

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee." These words stand verified by the experience of believers in every age and race and circumstance. Have we been taught the power of prevailing prayer? Do we know from a blessed personal experience that we have a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God? Have we learned the lesson which holy men in all ages in nearly the same words have so urgently impressed upon us: that prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but taking hold upon God's willingness? If we have made such blessed certainties our own, we may confidently meet all the changes and chances of this mortal life, resting upon the great facts of Revelation and experience to which Browning has testified in two lines,—

"The work began when first your prayer was uttered,
And God will finish what He has begun."

It is true there are difficulties in prayer, that objections are made to prayer. But one of the best answers to all objections is that the human heart must pray—cannot help praying; and that, therefore, that which is so spontaneous

and truly natural is implanted by the Creator and must have its normal and lawful exercise according to His will. Abraham Lincoln once said, " I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day." " And," writes St. John, " this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."

THE MERCIES OF GOD.

FRIDAY AFTER THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.”—Gen. xxxii. 10.

THESE are among the opening words of Jacob's great prayer. His brother Esau is advancing against him with four hundred armed men. Jacob has put his mind to the task of saving himself. He has thought out the problem and has acted upon his thoughts. He can do no more; and so, as the shadows of the Eastern night begin to fall, he retires to a solitary spot near the ford of the river Jabbok, and there he calls upon his God. This beautiful prayer has furnished themes for many sermons and is rich in spiritual lessons.

1. In the first place it is the prayer of humility. “I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies.” In the attitude of humility alone can the creature consistently approach the Creator. We cannot say, “I thank Thee that I am not as other men are;” we cannot use the language of merit before our Maker; the man who pleads his own merit, as some one has said, does not pray, he but demands his due. And if Jacob's words are the natural expression of the human heart in great distress or danger, if self-righteousness instantly flees from our hearts and lips when the ship is sinking, when the loved one lies in the clutch of some disease, then, surely, it is equally out of place in all real prayer. As St. Augustine

has said, "The sufficiency of my merit is to know that my merit is not sufficient."

Notice, also, that Jacob uses the present tense, "I *am* not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies and Thy truth;" literally, "I am less than them all." He does not say, as we sometimes do, "O Lord, I *was* a miserable sinner, when I was young, when I fell from grace, when I met that great temptation few could have withstood." He does not say, "I was unworthy when I cheated Esau twenty years ago; I was not strictly honest in my dealings with Laban seven years ago." No, he brings his confession down to date: "I am in the prime of life, I am rich and great, but I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies." Humility is not only an essential quality in all real prayer; it is also an integral part of Christian character itself. And yet so delicate a thing is this grace that it is scarcely safe even to be conscious of it, and the moment we speak of our own humility we cease to be humble. And so subtle a sin is spiritual pride that it often leads us to deceive ourselves and to attempt to deceive others. Coleridge, who frequently went to the root of things, was not far wrong when he said:

"And the devil did grin,
For his darling sin is pride that apes humility."

Humility seems to be, furthermore, a plant of slow growth. In this age and in this country it will be safe to say that it is not conspicuous in the words and ways of the young. Many an upstart youth is wiser than the Creeds and has outgrown the "literature" of the Testaments. The social decencies and usages and laws which have been formulated by the wisdom and experience of his fathers are irksome. But a right estimate of our-

selves, and some knowledge of the mercies and the truth of God, teach humility. Years of prayer also humble the soul. When the wheat is young it lifts up its head; when it is nearly ripe it bows and bends lower than when it was green. Only out of a lifelong Christian experience can any of us say with perfect sincerity in the day of safety and success, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies of God."

2. Again, this is the prayer of faith. Jacob does not address a stranger, or an impersonal force, or a tendency, or a law. He calls upon the living, loving God, who is his God, whom he knows, who knows him. "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord." He appeals to the God of the Covenant, the Deity who had blessed his father and his grandfather, enriching them with precious promises which he had inherited, and who had personally touched his own soul and spoken to him in promise and command. "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac." Can you say that? "O God of my father." "My father's God art Thou." If you know that, if your father's prayers have gone before you, let them be followed by your own. "Thine own and thy father's friend, forsake not." And what an argument is this to lead parents to become consistent communicants of the Church! If it be true, as it is, that we never quite know what our parents' hearts felt for us till we become parents ourselves, that when we first hold our own child in our arms God opens the doors of the past and reveals to us the sacredness and the mystery of our own father's and mother's love for us—if this be true, is it not also true that if we know our parents loved us in the Lord, dedicated us in prayer to Him who gave the gift, such

knowledge must ever be the strongest of those "gold chains" which knit us to the throne of God? If you have taught your children to pray and prayed with and for them, if they have seen you kneel before the Sacrament of Jesus's love, be assured, whatever else they forget, they will never forget that. Will you not make it possible for those you love to say in the dark day—and the dark day will come for them; you cannot keep it from them—will you not by your faith and practice make it possible for them to exclaim in the season of temptation and sorrow and despair, "O God of my father, O God of my mother, you helped him in that day when there was no help to be found in man, you strengthened her in her hour of anguish, O help me!"

Notice, too, the beautiful simplicity of the prayer which springs from faith. Short, direct, artless, a confiding child might have uttered it to an earthly parent to whom it had fled for refuge. "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me." And in these childlike words we meet one of the deep things of human life—fear and faith joined together; and, paradoxical as it may seem, the two contradictory feelings experienced at one and the same time; fear for the future and faith in God—the same thought to which David gives utterance when he cries, "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee." "And such," as Robertson has said, "our Christian life must ever be; not an entire life of rest, for we have sinned; nor an entire life of unrest, for God has forgiven us; but in all life a mixture of the two. Christ alone had perfect tranquillity, for He alone had perfect purity."

3. Again, Jacob pleads the promises. "'Thou saidst,

I will deal well with thee; Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea.' If Esau slay my children that promise fails." These promises were made at Bethel and Jacob boldly and fervently reminds the Promiser of His pledged word. The prophet Isaiah represents God as saying to His people, "' Put Me in remembrance ' of My promises and call upon Me." And so when Jacob pleads the promises his feet are on the rock,—“ Thou saidst.” “ Thou hast promised.” To learn the promises of Holy Scripture is therefore an essential part of the education of a Christian. God's pledged word He will make good, for it is impossible for Him to lie. And when we can take a promise, as Jacob did, and turn it into a prayer, we also shall lay hold upon the mighty God of Jacob. Thou hast said, “ Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” Lord, I ask; I seek; I knock! Thou hast said, “ A clean heart will I give thee, and a new spirit will I put within thee.” Create in me, O God, a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me! Thou hast said, “ Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee.” I, this day, O blessed Lord, am in trouble; deliver me from it, and sanctify it to my soul's good that I too may say, “ It is good for me that I have been in trouble; before I was troubled I went wrong, but now have I kept Thy word!”

Let us, in humility and in faith, pleading the promises, freely also open our hearts to our Heavenly Father, telling out to Him all our sorrows, fears, and dangers, and we shall be heard and answered and delivered as Jacob was of old. Can we doubt it? Shall we be surprised that God keeps His word?

“ I stood amazed, and whispered, Can it be
That He hath granted all the boon I sought ?
How wonderful that He hath answered me !
O faithless heart ! He *said* that He would hear
And answer thy poor prayer ; and He *hath* heard,
And proved His promise ! Wherefore didst thou fear ?
Why marvel that the Lord hath kept His word ?
More wonderful if He should fail to bless
Expectant faith and prayer with good success ! ”

TWO BANDS.

SATURDAY AFTER THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

“With my staff I passed over this Jordan ; and now I am become two bands.”—Gen. xxxii. 10.

IT is a true saying that “ a grateful thought towards heaven is of itself a prayer.” While earnestly praying God to save his life, his goods, and his family from the avenging hand of Esau, Jacob yields to a mood of thanksgiving which graciously sweeps down upon his heart. His own sin and unworthiness have been confessed—“ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant ;” now he will dwell upon the plenteousness of these mercies which he has received—“ All Thy mercies.” Let me, said Jacob, count them up, year by year, and realize how great and how free these mercies have been. Doubtless, too, his sense of the preciousness of God’s gifts is quickened by his immediate danger of losing them all. It is often so with us. While our mercies are assuredly ours we are careless about them ; when they spread their wings to take their flight from us we awake to their value.

While thus meditating upon all the gracious loving-kindnesses of the Lord through the whole course of his life, his eye falls upon the staff in his hand. “ ‘ With this staff,’ he exclaims, ‘ I passed over Jordan,’ when I was a poor boy leaving home to make my way in the world. Then I was all alone, no servants, no changes of

raiment, no bags full of silver and gold, wifeless and childless, this staff was all I had; and now once more I stand by the rolling Jordan, this time on my way home, home to my native land, home to the scenes of my childhood; now I am rich, my name is great, my family and my flocks are sufficient to form two bands! I have divided my family and possessions into two companies and sent them forward by different roads in the hope that one band in the darkness may escape the fury of the avenger. Should one band be destroyed (which God forbid!) I should still be the head of a great caravan, rich and blessed beyond any man in the land;—and once I stood by this Jordan a penniless youth with nothing save this staff in my hand!”

Jacob here sets an excellent example. Too many of us forget the staff with which we passed over Jordan. In our American life the greater part of our successful and well-to-do people can look back upon days of youthful poverty or struggle. Too often, however, they fail to see the past as Jacob saw it. Sometimes there is the blush of shame at the recollection of the narrow street, the farmhouse home, the menial tasks, the humble friends; sometimes there is the proud boast, “I began with nothing and my power and the mightiness of mine hand have gotten me this wealth.” Jacob, on the contrary, acknowledges the truth: once he was poor and friendless; now through the undeserved mercies of God he is rich and great; he has become two bands. It is to be feared that even the best of us are lacking in thankfulness as well as in the expression of our thanks to God in prayer. Yet God expects our thanksgiving and, strange as it may seem, delights in our poor expressions of gratitude. “Whoso offereth Me thanks and praise, he honoreth Me.” “In everything

give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." But murmurs rather than thanks are on our lips. Thanksgiving has no place even in the prayers we teach our children. Nevertheless we have much to be thankful for. Health and happiness, length of days, providential ordering of circumstances, our good name, our hereditary culture, our substance, our family, our Christian hope, the grace which maketh us to differ from another—a little reflection must bring us to the grateful realization of the fact that these, one and all, are the free and undeserved mercies of God.

It is told us as a proof of Jacob's gratitude that he never parted with his staff, that he leaned upon it when he was a-dying, and blessed the two sons of Joseph, and that it went with him into his grave. Some of us may know from personal experience how Jacob looked upon that staff. It may be that we too have some like possession which money could not buy because we associate it with some turning-point in our own early life. Many of us, surely, in the confidence that goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life can look forward in the certain faith that there are abundant mercies yet to come.

On the other hand, it is possible, only too possible, that some one may say, "At certain seasons I have felt thankful to God for His blessings; I have been grateful to kind friends and relatives for favors bestowed upon me; yet, on the whole, as I review the past and forecast the future, I cannot see that I have any special reason for thanksgiving. There are many around me who have received rich and precious gifts, who seem to be favorites of Heaven. For my part I cannot honestly declare with the Psalmist, 'My cup runneth over.' " To such we may

reply in the eloquent words of a well-known American preacher: "If one should give me a dish of sand, and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes, and search for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it, and how it would draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction! The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings; only the iron in God's sand is gold."

Yes, the gold of heavenly blessings unnumbered is to be found by every thankful heart. And one way to attain this thankful heart is to compare what God gives us with what we deserve. To remember that in Him we live and move and have our being, that we cannot deny that we have more than we actually need, that if we are not worthy of the *least* of all the mercy and all the truth which God has bestowed upon us—how much more are we unworthy of *all* the mercy and of *all* the truth which He has shown us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. For, all earthly benefits, life, health, food, raiment, reason, are simply shadows and types of that great mercy and truth revealed to us in the Church's Divine Head, in whom and through whom we have the means of grace and the hope of glory.

Another method of attaining a thankful heart is to think and to speak often of the goodness of God. The thought framed in words addressed to God and men will strengthen and increase the feeling in our hearts. It is significant that the great poet of our language so frequently teaches this truth. "God's goodness hath

been great to thee," he says, "let never day nor night unhallowed pass, but still remember what the Lord hath done." Again, he addresses the Giver of all good gifts: "O Lord, who lendest me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness." And again, we have the beautiful words: "Or any ill escaped, or good attained, let us remember still, Heaven chalked the way that brought us thither." That was Jacob's consolation. He knew "Heaven had chalked the way" he had journeyed from Jordan back to Jordan once more, and would still lead him on. Such grateful confidence should be our own.

But in the words of the text, "I am become two bands," there is another lesson which must at least be mentioned. Our Lord by His baptism in this same river Jordan sanctified water to the mystical washing away of sin; therefore those who have been made members of His body in that sacrament of regeneration can say, "With my staff, with what were only the natural gifts of conscience and the works of the natural man, I passed over the waves of my baptism; and now I am become two bands—I have that godliness which has promise of the life that now is and also of that which is to come."

We are told, furthermore, that Jacob's family was in two separate bands. So is ours. Some are in Paradise, some on earth; but in the blessed communion of saints one family still. Of the faithful departed the Christian heart may say, "We see not the glorious faces of those who are now walking before Him in the land of the living; but it is a joy to know that they are sometimes turned towards us. We cannot hear the voices which sound in that distant land, celebrating the praise of God; but it is a comfort to know that among those utterances

are prayers for us who are still in our pilgrimage and who serve as yet by faith." They do not forget us. Let us keep warm our love for them and strive to follow their good examples.

So, too, one day, every one of us will in another sense become two bands. The soul will be separated from the body. But they will be reunited again beyond Jordan as were the two bands of Jacob of old.

Thus all our Christian hopes are centred in Christ. Temporal blessings, spiritual gifts, heavenly promises, come alike from Him, to whom be praise, and thanksgiving, and dominion, forever and ever!

GOD WRESTLING WITH JACOB.

MONDAY AFTER THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.”—Gen. xxxii. 24.

A T mid-Lent the Church would seem to suggest a change in the spiritual exercises of her children. During the first weeks of this holy season we were charged to give ourselves up to the work of repentance, and in the Collect for yesterday we were taught, as the result of our self-examinations, to acknowledge that for our evil deeds we do worthily deserve to be punished ; but the days that remain are especially consecrated to the remembrance of those mysterious sufferings by which the gift of repentance was purchased for us. We are now in a general sense to turn from self to Christ. Our Lord’s wrestling with sin and death and with His own human will are from this time on to be much in our thoughts.

The life of Jacob, which seems specially helpful for Lenten study, adapts itself, as we have divided it, to such devout considerations. In the narrative before us we are to see this Heel-catcher and Supplanter wrestling long years between his love for self and his love for God, never since his Ladder-vision failing to live the life of faith and prayer, yet constantly setting his affections on things below—this man we are now to see turned away from earth and brought face to face with God in a conflict terminating in victory for the best that was in him,

making him worthy of his new name, Israel, the Prince of God.

In his great prayer he has confessed his unworthiness of the least of all the mercies of God, and now, as he approaches the Holy Land to possess it as the inheritor of the promises of the Covenant, he beseeches Divine protection from the dangers which confront him. He fears his brother Esau, who, with four hundred armed men, threatens his destruction. He has sent his family and his flocks over the stream. In the night, restless and sleepless, he wanders along the banks of the river in the darkness. There in the shadows "a man" wrestles with him through the night. It was some one who desired to hold him back from entering upon the inheritance. Jacob put forth all his strength, but the vigorous muscles which once lifted the great stone from the well's mouth in order that Rachel's sheep might drink found their match in his unknown antagonist. He seeks in vain to discover the features of his foe. A sense of mystery begins to creep upon him. Can it be Esau's guardian angel who is holding him back from the Promised Land? Possibly it is his own *alter ego* in bodily form grappling with him—a thought likely to alarm the boldest. But Jacob, who has been a wrestler from the day of his birth, when he caught his brother by the heel, struggled on "until the breaking of the day." "And when he," the mysterious adversary, "saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him." Instantly Jacob realizes that his assailant is Divine, and, ceasing to resist, clings to the Angel-man with the importunate cry of entreaty, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me!" The answer to this

heartfelt appeal was a question, "What is thy name?" "And he said, Jacob," "The Heel-catcher," "The Supplanter." Then, replied his Companion, "Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel—the princely wrestler with God—for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed. And He blessed him there."

Now, it is not necessary to materialize the old narrative, for we know that all wrestling which brings spiritual blessing takes place in the human soul. Yet Jacob speaks of this superhuman Wrestler as "God," and the blessing he received came from God. This is the strange part of the story. We are familiar with the thought that a man must wrestle with himself; that the higher and the lower natures in us contend for the mastery. We also know that each one of us is called upon to wrestle with the world. Rivalry in business, rivalry in the affections, adverse circumstances, environment, the course of events—each one of us who would maintain a consistent Christian life and character must wrestle against the precepts, the forces, the vain pomp and glory of the world. We know, too, that the Christian is sometimes set to wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, against the wiles of the devil. We all know from personal experience what it is to contend with the adversary of our souls who goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. To wrestle with the world, the flesh, and the devil is a warfare to which we are all called in our Christian Baptism.

But is God also our enemy? Must we wrestle against Him to save ourselves from harm? Does this passage teach that we must agonize in prayer in order to wrest

from unwilling God His blessings? No, because God is for us and not against us, and ever more ready to give than we to ask. It is a sufficient answer to all such questions to point out that it was not Jacob who wrestled with God but God who wrestled with Jacob. It was not Jacob who wrestled in prayer for a blessing; it was God who wrestled with Jacob to subdue him into a willingness to be blessed. Divine Love contended with double-minded, double-dealing Jacob in order to win his entire trust and confidence. Up to this night guile had been the patriarch's rule of life; cunning, management, trickery, had been his chief reliance in accomplishing the purposes which his ambition set before him. During this day, however, he had made a resolution of amendment. When Esau threatened his destruction he promised to relinquish all that he had obtained by fraud from his brother; he sent princely presents, addressed messages to Esau as "Lord," thus declaring himself ready to abandon all claims to be his father's heir and head of the clan. But he had no thought of resigning his right to the spiritual promise of the Covenant of Abraham. Probably he was perplexed in mind as to the separation of the internal possessions of the birthright, which included the promise of being the forefather of the Messiah, from the outward privileges and powers of the headship of his tribe. It may be that his weeping and tears spoken of by the prophet Hosea were caused by difficulty in understanding how the sacrifice he was determined to make as an act of restitution would still leave him in possession of the real and chief object of his desire. Probably also he felt that Esau's anger was all, or nearly all, that demanded the sacrifice; that he secretly hoped by the keenness, nimbleness, and strength of his own trained mental

powers again to outwit his dull-witted brother and somehow place once more in his own hands all that he professed himself ready to relinquish forever. At any rate it is clear that the Jacob-nature, the deceit, the love of money, the pride of intellect, so strong in him always, though subdued by grace, was still predominant. Accordingly he was unfit to enter the Holy Land. He must be made ready to receive the blessing prepared for him. To break down forever his besetting sin the Nameless Wrestler seized upon him, nor let him go until, awakened to the real significance of the contention, wounded and helpless, Jacob clung to Him who withstood him in love, and begged the heavenly blessing upon his soul.

Moses had a similar experience. When he refused to submit his sons to the initiatory rite of the Old Covenant he was stricken down with illness. Then he obeyed and yielded his will to the will of God. Job, too, for his self-confidence and self-righteousness, was subjected to a discipline even more mysterious than the wrestling with Jacob. And in one way or another the Spirit of God is striving with us also here this day. A crisis of which we are conscious may be upon some of us. We feel that God is seeking with violence to crush down the evil weeds of self-will in our hearts, and self-will is so dear that we struggle on against the loving force of God. But more frequently, and especially with the young, it is the goodness of God that would lead us to repentance and stay us from evil. His striving with our stubborn wills is in the gentle and gracious ministries of His Church, in the affections of our homes, in the blessings of His providence. Punishment is "His strange work." It would be easy for this Divine Wrestler to subdue us by a stroke. But

He will seek first and often to subdue us by love. If we realized that He who wrestles with us is our best friend, should we not instantly cease our resistance and cling to Him as Jacob did, crying, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me!" No sooner is that prayer uttered from the heart than the blessing comes and the morning breaks.

PENIEL.

TUESDAY AFTER THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel : for I have seen God face to face.”—Gen. xxxii. 30.

WE cannot fail to see a spiritual as well as a literal meaning in the story of God's wrestling with Jacob at the fords of the Jabbok. The writer seems desirous of showing us a parable in the history. In the original this is clearer than in the English version. Everything in the narrative “is double, like the swan and its shadow on the lake.” The peculiarities of the style, especially its unusual repetitions, can scarcely be otherwise explained. The narrative undoubtedly bears evidences of the fact that the sacred historian invites his readers to look below the surface meaning of his words, and would call attention to the “ethical crisis” in Jacob's career and emphasize the significance of the disclosure of the Divine purposes and methods here made to Jacob and to all who walk by faith. To-day let us consider three of these deeper, spiritual teachings of the narrative.

1. In the first place we may observe that the Christian fathers and older interpreters, almost without exception, make the wrestling Jacob a type of Christ in His agony in Gethsemane. Jacob was alone when he wrestled; Christ, too, was alone in the Garden when the mysterious strife came upon Him,—“He trod the wine-press alone and of the people there was none with Him.” Near the

ford of the Jabbok Jacob wrestled; Christ wrestled near the brook of Kedron. It was night when both endured the conflict. An angel blessed Jacob; an angel strengthened the Lord in His agony. We read that the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint and of Christ we are told that all His bones were out of joint when it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. Neither has it escaped attention that Jacob was touched in the thigh and that from his loins the true Israelite was to descend, who, in the fulness of time should wrestle and prevail and open the Kingdom of Heaven, the real land of promise, to all believers. In the Garden of Gethsemane there was a struggle, momentary it may be, but in some sense a real struggle, between the human will in Christ and the will of God. He desired to be delivered from that cup. In His conflict there was bloody sweat and tears and He conquered only as Jacob conquered, by a submission in which He was enabled to utter the prayer, "Not My will but Thine be done." St. Ambrose speaks for all the early Church when he says: "Because the faith of Jacob was invincible, and his devotion insuperable, therefore God revealed to him hidden mysteries, and touched his thigh; for from him was to come the Lord Jesus, born of a virgin and co-equal with God; through whose cross and passion sins are forgiven, and the world redeemed; and a glorious resurrection and a blessed immortality are purchased for us."

2. Again, in Jacob's saying, "This spot is Peniel because here I have seen God face to face," we may read below the surface of the words. Jacob's conception of God was far short of that which has been revealed to us. We know that God is Love. You will remember that Jacob said to the Heavenly Wrestler, "Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy

name.” “ Wherefore dost thou ask after My name ? ”
was the answer which denied the request. It was sufficient that Jacob recognized his antagonist as the God of Abraham and of Isaac; the time was not yet ripe for a fuller revelation of the Divine name and character. That revelation we have received bounteously. We know that God’s name and nature is Love. And yet the loving-kindness of the Lord which wrestled with Jacob and prepared him for the blessing and finally blessed him is evidence that God has not changed and was in Himself of old what He is now and ever must be. Charles Wesley has finely brought out the Christian interpretation of the story in his hymn :

“ Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see,
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee ;
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

“ I need not tell Thee who I am,
My misery or sin declare ;
Thyself hast called me by my name ;
Look on Thy hands and read it there !
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou ?
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

“ Wilt Thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable name ?
Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell ;
To know it now resolved I am :
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

“ Yield to me now, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair ;
Speak to my heart, in blessing speak,

The Bartered Birthright.

Be conquered by my instant prayer !
 Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,
 And tell me if Thy name is Love !

“ My prayer hath power with God ; the grace
 Unspeakable I now receive ;
 Through faith I see Thee face to face,
 I see Thee face to face, and live ;
 In vain I have not wept and strove,
 Thy nature, and Thy name, is Love.

“ I know Thee, Saviour, who Thou art,
 Jesus, the feeble sinners' friend !
 Nor wilt Thou with the night depart,
 But stay, and love me to the end ;
 Thy mercies never shall remove,
 Thy nature, and Thy name, is Love.

“ Contented now upon my thigh
 I halt, till life's short journey end,
 All helplessness, all weakness, I
 On Thee alone for strength depend ;
 Nor have I power from Thee to move ;
 Thy nature, and Thy name, is Love.”

And that same Divine love, doubt it not, is wrestling with each one of us to-day. It resists us, now with a gentleness scarcely observable, now with violence, in order to win our answering love and to prepare us for blessings already laid up in store.

3. Take a third thought. At Peniel Jacob learned the *prevenient*, the going-before grace of God. God stood before His servant to lead him into the paths of holiness. It is a beautiful thought that God is the inspirer of our prayers, of our purest spiritual longings, of all desires to conquer self,—a thought full of strength and comfort, a thought to make us very glad and very hopeful, a thought to make us always willing to follow the Divine drawing

and enter into the heavenly presence where we too may see God face to face. He knows how weak and gross our apprehension of Him is. "He knoweth whereof we are made. He remembereth that we are but dust." He sees how unrefined and earthly we are and He goes before and meets us, wrestles with us, in order that He may reveal Himself to us and us to ourselves. When we are sad, as Jacob was, and worn with care, anxious about the morrow, fearful of what is coming on the earth, troubled for ourselves and ours, our hearts trembling for the Ark of God and the future of the Church, and we can find no consolation in human companionship, but perceive ourselves to be drawn away by invisible hands, then it is God—the God who inspires as well as answers the soul's needs—who is leading us to a Peniel of blessing. At such seasons we seek God as "Thirsty lands gasp for the golden showers with outstretched hands;" we are lifted above all earthly thoughts. "Give me Thine own gift of holiness," is our earnest cry; "make me like Thyself; create in me a new heart and renew a right spirit within me." We come before God as Jacob came, with a bounded vision; we go from Him with our horizon widening with the day. We take on something of the freedom and calmness and patience and peace of the matured spiritual state. We too can say as we come out from these Peniels of conflict, "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved."

Let us remember the three suggestions brought before us this day. At Peniel we see in wrestling Jacob a figure of the Lord in His agony in Gethsemane saying, "Thy will be done;" in God's conflict with Jacob we learn that the name and nature of the Divine Wrestler is Love; and from the fact that God went before His servant,

called him to the contest, came to him, and prepared him even at the cost of wounds for higher blessings, we are taught the going-before of the grace of God who is the inspirer of all advances in holiness, who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Yes, the grace of the God who loves us will go before us through the long night of our wrestling, will ever keep us wakeful and watchful, will ever inspire and quicken our souls to renounce the evil and choose the good, even by healing bruises, until the day break and the shadows flee away.

THE PRINCE OF GOD.

WEDNESDAY AFTER THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

"Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."—Gen. xxxii. 28.

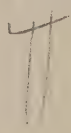
THE spiritual experience related in this chapter has sometimes been called Jacob's conversion. But Jacob was converted in his youth at Bethel. At Bethel God first touched his heart in the vision of the ladder let down from heaven to earth. There Jacob chose God and the service of God, dedicating his life to Him who thus revealed the heavenly world to His servant's adoring faith. The present crisis in his career, wherein he received his new name, belongs to the experiences of the maturer believer. As the spiritual life advances and the years pass, the child of God usually comes to some such second marked parting of the ways. The experience of God's people of old finds its analogy in the spiritual life, as has frequently been pointed out; and some years of desert wandering usually intervene between the Passover, with its deliverance from the oppressor, and the passage over Jordan into the happy confidence of assured possession.

At Bethel long years ago Jacob saw the Ladder-vision and became a religious man. He believed in the things above his head. He put his trust in God. But he also believed in himself; he thought of God, for the most part, as One who could protect him from his foes and

help him to gain the earthly riches he coveted. Up to this time he was Jacob, the Heel-catcher, the Supplanter, the master of guile in all its forms, who always met men from whom advantage might be taken with the confidence of a superior intellect, vigorous in astuteness, unscrupulous in duplicity. He has not been permitted, it is true, to remain ignorant of his besetting sin, for more than once his craft has been punished, his pride humbled to the dust; neither has he failed in some earnest efforts to subdue his lower, baser nature. And so when the Divine Wrestler asked him his name he honestly confessed, "My name is Jacob, the layer of snares, the schemer, the plotter; Heel-catcher I have been from my youth up until now." Jacob's answer is the explanation of the struggle forced upon him. He must be taught once for all that the intellect used in the service of the senses is irreligious. He must be made to realize in the depths of his soul that religion cannot be divorced from morality; that the all-holy God cannot sanction lying, deceit, or pride, whether intellectual or spiritual; that earthly place and station must not be sought for its own sake nor ever by fraudulent arts. And so He who loved Jacob wrestled with him through the night. The agony of the strife was sore, lasting till the darkness faded before the dawn. In the wrestling of that night his Divine Friend and Foe subdued Jacob, taught him to say, "Thy will be done," and from henceforth he dwells in a higher moral and spiritual sphere, leaving his old duplicity behind him forever. "Thy name," said the Divine Wrestler, "shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed."

We shall make a mistake, however, and a serious mistake, if we suppose that the change in his name indicated

a radical change made at that moment in the entire tone and temper of his inner life. The dawn of that memorable day was but the harvest morning of a long season of spiritual growth. All that had gone before in his remarkable and eventful career was a preparation for the struggle in which he gained his new name. Peniel was a richer, brighter place in his memory than were Bethel or Mahanaim; for though at Bethel he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on the crystal stairs, and at Mahanaim met them in the very road as they shed from their folded wings a golden glory on the earth, at Peniel he saw "God face to face and his life was preserved." Here he finds himself endowed with peculiar blessings unenjoyed and unknown before. If Bethel was the gate of heaven this is its vestibule. Like David and Solomon he asks and is given more than he asks. He begs a blessing and is named Israel; he asks for silver and is given gold; he asks for bread and is given manna. But Peniel was what it was because Jacob has always been unconsciously preparing for it. It would be folly to think that he would have triumphed in this hour and gained his princely name, if he had never struggled before. What happened is the result of a long ripening of the heart. It is the crowning of a long work. This is not the first time nor the second nor the hundredth time that Jacob has been in the Divine presence and sought divine aid. The time has come for Peniel. The fruits of the spirit, like all fruits under normal conditions, ripen slowly. Let us be patient, nor weary in well-doing, and in due season we too shall reap if we faint not. "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." And the same Apostle says



in another place: "Christ is as a son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." St. Paul, too, exhorts the Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

It is furthermore to be observed that in winning his new name Jacob won for himself an enduring place in secular and religious history. He is the recognized founder of the Israelitish race and nation. When we think what the word *Israel* stands for in literature, in the life of the world, past, present, and to come, in the spiritual culture and aspiration of the race, we realize in some measure the wonderful significance of the blessing bestowed upon Jacob at Peniel. All Israelites have looked to Jacob as their ancestor; and Christians, too, by their faith, are children of Israel. Nor can we fail to notice that the contrast between the cunning of Jacob's earlier life and the purer, nobler manhood into which he grew, of which his new name was the symbol, is a contrast which is to be traced in his descendants, both as a nation and as individuals. In true Israelites, as in Nathanael of the New Testament, there is no guile; and of Christ, the King of Israel, the true Israel, it is written, "Neither was guile found in his mouth." More than one commentator has pointed out that the most vivid representation of this contrast—of the contrast between the Jacob-nature and the Israel-nature—is the guileless Christ receiving from Judas the kiss of betrayal.

Again, while Jacob entered the Holy Land on the morrow not as Jacob but as Israel, he nevertheless carried with him the marks of the contest. The lameness re-

ceived in the struggle remained and ever afterwards he halted in his walk. "So it sometimes happens," as has been said, "that a man never recovers from the severe handling he has received at some turning-point in his life." After God wrestles with a man to purify his soul often that man goes limping through life from the contest. The broken health, or fortune, or pride leaves him bereft of the confident, jaunty self-assurance which once gave a force and a charm to his outward personality. Yet Jacob's wounds were tokens of victory and were ever so regarded by his descendants. Our Lord, after His Resurrection, bore, and still bears, the five wounds of His Passion; but they are glorified wounds, evidences of His conquest over sin, Satan, and death; wounds spiritualized, beautified beyond description; nevertheless wounds which remain as badges of His sorrow and of His triumph. The nail-prints of the Cross are the abiding proofs of Christ's struggle as well as of His victory. And the fact that He suffered in His earthly wrestling, as His wounds show, is the chief reason why He holds His supreme place in history and in the affections of our hearts. Power with God which Jacob won, which Christ won, left upon the victor the scars of the conflict. So it is with us in our measure. The conflicts to which we are called are sore. They leave upon us enduring reminders of the sufferings of the strife. But these wounds are the badges of our power. Goethe touches the border of this truth when he says:

"Who ne'er his bread in sorrow ate,
Who ne'er the mournful midnight hours
Weeping upon his bed hath sat,
He knows ye not, ye unseen powers."

Spiritual conflict alone can win a high mastery of self.

Faith, patience, true wisdom—these precious possessions come not of themselves. Night-watchings, fightings within and without, agonies of the flesh, travails of the soul—from these and such like wrestlings come the peace and power of a will that owns the will of God. Such battles leave their wound-prints, but these wound-prints are the emblems of victory. They are scars glorified and beautified because evidences of that hard-fought battle in which the wrestling believer has been changed into an Israel who has power with God and men and prevails.

STRANGE GODS PUT AWAY.

THURSDAY AFTER THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you.”—Gen. xxxv. 2.

SOMEONE who knew the heart of man has said, “Nothing is so pleasant as to give up one’s will *in one’s own way*.” The pleasantness of such subtlety had a peculiar charm for Jacob. But at Peniel God wrestled with him and taught him the vanity of shams in religion. As the sun rose that day on halting Jacob he was ready for the first time to say with perfect sincerity, “Thy will, not mine, be done; done in Thine own way.” The narrative which leads up to the text shows us that the new grace bestowed upon Jacob, of which his new name, Israel, was the symbol, was a reality and marked out an epoch in the culture of his soul. He resolved to restore to his brother Esau all that he had obtained by fraud. In the strength of that resolution he played the man, placed himself at the head of his reunited bands and boldly advanced, doubting not that he should prevail with man, according to the promise of the Wrestler, as he had already prevailed with God. In a few hours Esau’s four hundred mounted warriors caught sight of the slowly advancing caravan and galloped down upon them, and behold! Esau threw away his weapon, ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, and they both wept. In the night God had “appeased” Esau. Jacob adhered to his resolution, made the same night in his wrestling, addressed

his brother as " Lord," recognized him as the first-born, heir of his father's earthly goods, head of the tribe, chief in all save the spiritual promise of the birthright. In his own frank and hearty way Esau forgave Jacob on the spot, welcomed his family and declined the rich gifts Jacob offered, saying, " Keep them, my brother, I have enough." But Jacob insisted upon making the restitution. " If now," he said, " I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it." On both sides there may have been something of that excess of courtesy characteristic of Oriental manners; each said, " I have enough"—a saying which few men of to-day, it is to be feared, could repeat with entire truthfulness; yet the old Jewish interpretation of the peculiar accent used in the Hebrew where mention is made of Esau's " kiss," and that modern construction of Jacob's words which makes them false and canting, do equal injustice to the men and to the narrative. The reconciliation was real and true. Esau accepted the presents and never asked for more. He cared nothing whatever for the religious privileges of the birthright, and the question of rank did not concern him. He was duke of his own Edom country and he had enough. Jacob's solemn words reminded him of the holy lessons of his childhood. He was touched by the look on his brother's face. In his eagerness to give expression to the impulse of the moment he offered to accompany his brother on his journey. But the prudence and foresight which never deserted Jacob warned him that it would be

well to part while the reconciliation was complete, while each could carry away softening memories of the meeting; whereupon he soon separated from Esau and went on his journey.

Notice that Jacob left behind him only his presents. He departed richer, far richer, rather than poorer, because of the sacrifice which he had made in will, which he was ready to make in deed. We began with the saying that "Nothing is so pleasant as to give up one's own will in one's own way." Might we not add that it is also very pleasant to make a real sacrifice, as Jacob did, and be immediately rewarded by the return of all and more than we sacrificed? There is a true story, which possibly would not be altogether foreign to the experience of some of us, of a man who, after a severe inward struggle, forced himself to give a certain sum of money in response to some urgent call of the Church, and who soon afterwards received, quite unexpectedly, a much larger sum. The story, moreover, goes on to tell us that when he was asked again to give he resolved to repeat his former stroke of good luck and gave this time with the distinct hope and expectation of getting back double his money—and met with disappointment. In this lottery he drew a blank. Generosity, righteousness, love, are always rewarded; they are their own reward. The temporal rewards of goodness, on the contrary, are not to be gambled for, nor does God buy our service with an immediate, unfailing, earthly compensation.

Notice, also, the significance of Jacob's return to the land of promise. The secular writers do not exaggerate when they speak of Jacob's home-coming as a "great historical event;" great, because he and his shepherd tribe "bore with them the future religious destinies

of the world." After the long journey his flocks needed rest; and he, too, had passed through trials which entitled him to a season of repose and meditation. Accordingly he settled near the border, first in the lowlands, afterwards in the highlands, of Shechem; bought and paid for a large tract of land, making payment in coined silver — mentioned here for the first time, probably stamped with the image of a lamb, there being no mention of gold coin until the reign of David. Here also in Shechem he dug the well which still bears his name. Travellers tell us that the well goes down through twenty feet of loose soil, this part being carefully built in with neatly dressed stones, after which the bore is made through the solid limestone rock. "The entire depth was, in the year 1881, sixty-seven feet, but in 1866 it was seventy-five feet, and may originally have been a hundred, or a hundred and fifty, for stones are continually dropped into it by visitors." We are also told that the bore is nine feet in diameter, and that it usually contains as much as twelve feet of water, although sometimes dry in the summer-time. The sinking of such a well is a proof of Jacob's skill, industry, and wealth, as well as an "existing monument of his habitual prudence," for an enemy might have cut him off from the stream. The slope upon which this well is located has become famous in Jewish annals. Here Abraham built his first altar in the land of Canaan; Joseph's bones, carried in the exodus from Egypt, were interred near by at his dying command; and at Jacob's well our blessed Lord declared His Messiahship to the woman of Samaria, foretold the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the extension of Christian faith and worship throughout the world.

Many years of peace and prosperity ensued. But the

repose of the household was rudely broken by two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, who with a deceitful cruelty sacked the town of Shechem as an act of vengeance for a wrong done to their sister Dinah, slaughtering many of the natives, making captives of the rest, and carrying off the spoils. There was danger that other tribes in the neighborhood would take up the quarrel and destroy Jacob with all his family. In this hour of peril the patriarch's Divine Friend reminded him of Bethel, where he would be safe — Bethel, which he had too long neglected. It was a call to a renewed advance in holiness. He must no more be content with a border residence in the land of promise. The sins of his children warned him that he had neglected their religious training, had failed to govern his household as a man of God. Seeing clearly the cause of the evil which had fallen upon him, he calls his family to repentance and prayer. "Put away," was his command, "the strange gods that are among you, and change your garments: and let us arise and go to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." The women of the household were chiefly responsible for this idolatrous worship. Rachel herself had stolen her father's images and doubtless consulted them in the presence of the children and dependants. But when Jacob gave the command, ashamed of the folly of their superstition, all obeyed and delivered up the idols, which he buried beneath an oak in Shechem.

The lesson is plain. Heads of religious households are accountable for the strange gods beneath their roofs. Is the tone of our own home life free from such contamination? Is the talk of our sons and daughters at the family

board and fireside untouched by worldliness, untarnished by the materialism of the day ? Are pure deeds, lofty aims, unselfish behavior fostered and praised there and the example of them set in the fairest colors ? Were this text painted on the walls of the living-room of Christian homes it might preach a sermon many of us need : “ *Put away the strange gods that are among you !* ”

THE OAK OF SHECHEM.

FRIDAY AFTER THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.”—Gen. xxxv. 4.

MAN has been called an imitative animal. He does as others do. This instinctive readiness to imitate the words and ways and acts of those around us gives to *example* its power and its responsibility. In every relation of life, consciously or unconsciously, we influence one another, and there is nothing so constraining as example.

In the text we learn that while Jacob was struggling out of his old selfish life into a nobler manhood, ceasing to be Jacob, becoming Israel, the Prince of God, his household was being corrupted with idolatry. The example of Rachel, who still retained the images she had stolen from her father, the faith and practices of the servants and of the heathen captives of Shechem, appealed to the superstitions of the children, and little by little the members of the chosen family were being turned away from the true God to fix their affections upon idols made with hands. No doubt Jacob should have taken the idols from his wife years before, when he first discovered them. But his love for Rachel was so tender that he had not the heart to displease her. It may be that the images and other objects of superstition, supposed to be endowed with talismanic virtues, were

kept out of his sight, and that the worship of them, for the most part, escaped the attention of one so deeply engrossed with other interests. Still, he knew something of the state of affairs, and he "held his peace." If, however, for any reason, he had not cared to exercise his authority, surely one with Jacob's power in mastering men would have found it easy to win these young people from their superstitions. His powerful intellect, employing the craftiness he loved, would have met with little opposition or suspicion. A sarcastic allusion to the infinite power of men-made gods before Simeon and Levi; a hint to Reuben that the first-born was not necessarily the heir; a slight sternness or an intimation of restricted liberties to wilful Dinah, the only daughter; a loving appeal to little Joseph, who like his father dreamed of the stars and of what was beyond them—some such course as this would have checked the evil. One of the Puritan divines speaks of a father who whipped his son for swearing and swore himself while he whipped him, thus doing more harm by his example than good by his correction. But Jacob neither set the example of worshipping idols nor corrected his children for such folly. He took no notice of it.

Christian parents cannot make over to their children their own spiritual attainments, but they can restrain them from the idols of the world. Perhaps the heaviest punishment ever visited upon a believing parent was meted out to Eli. And Eli was punished not because he failed to lead his children into those higher paths of holiness which he himself loved; retribution came upon him simply because "his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not." This much at least Eli might have done, Jacob might have done—every Christian parent might do to-day.

And so the young people followed the example of the mother and of the servants. The power of example can scarcely be over-stated. What is any other source of influence in comparison? "Actions speak louder than words;" yet speech is potent. The poet says truly:

" Words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think."

But the words will die away on the ear; those thoughts will vanish with the closed book. You may forget the one, you may neglect the other. From the example of those around you, however, there is no escape. In childhood example is everything. The lessons thus learned in the early years are seldom unlearned or forgotten. It was Ruskin who said: "Take your vase of Venice glass out of the furnace and strew chaff over it in its transparent heat, and recover that to its clearness and rubied glory, when the north wind has blown upon it; but do not think to strew chaff over the child fresh from God's presence and to bring the heavenly colors back to him—at least in this world." It is also true that the capacity of youth to receive impressions for good or for evil never grows old. We are ever as steel to hold such impressions, as wax to take them. The photographer's sensitive plate and the Æolian harp are familiar illustrations of the readiness of the human heart to respond to outward influences. We are moulded by our outward surroundings. We are the products of environment. Rightly or wrongly modern thought places environment above heredity.

Furthermore, the influence of example is often an unconscious one. It is what we are rather than what we do

or say that moulds others. The shadow of the Apostle Peter passing by wrought miracles while Peter knew it not. Every man casts a moral shadow in which, often unintentionally, the man himself heals or wounds. There can be no more sobering thought than that of our accountability for our unconscious influence. It is not to be supposed that Rachel deliberately determined to lead the household away from the worship of the true God. The young people, however, seeing where she put her trust, to what powers she turned in perplexity or distress, followed her example. Thus all our lives are interlocked as are the forest trees, where, if one falls, its fall crushes others. Take, for instance, the example of public worship on the Lord's Day. One young girl who goes regularly to the early celebration will lead others to the altar. One deaf old man who is always in church sets an example which deserves the highest commendation. As he cannot hear a word it is known that he is present because he loves the Lord's house. Or take the example of a father, respected and respectable, of high standing, it may be, in the community, who desires his family to attend church yet goes not with them. His children see that the Church has no place in his affections. As they grow older, the boys especially, follow in their father's footsteps and gradually become insensible to the claims of God. If we look at the men in any of our congregations to-day we shall find that the great majority of them are men whose fathers went to church before them. The young men who drop out of Sunday-school and forsake the Church are, with very few exceptions, doing exactly as their fathers did at the same age.

All this leads on to the consideration of the fact that the power of example continues after death. It is post-

humorous. The evil men do lives after them ; so does the good. We are all of us in many ways the inheritors of men and women long departed. What we are now will also tell upon a generation yet unborn. There is a legend that after the battle of Chalôns the spirits of the slain soldiers continued the conflict for several days; and after we are in the grave the silent, invisible influences we have brought into being will continue their battle for good or for evil. Theodore Parker uttered a true saying when he lay dying in Italy: " There are two Theodore Parkers; one of them is dying in Italy; the other is planted in America and will continue to live." Yes, we have an immortality here on the earth. So far from blotting us out, death often intensifies our personal influence. The remembrance of our faith and works is often more constraining than the sight of them.

When Jacob was at length impelled to act, how, let us ask, did his family receive his godly admonition ? They obeyed without a murmur. " They gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand and Jacob hid them," destroyed and buried them, " under the oak which was by Shechem." Let believing parents of to-day be encouraged by Jacob's success. Let them lovingly, firmly, call for the idols of their own households and bury them under some oak of Shechem. The promises of Holy Scripture are many for those who truly seek to bring up their households in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. " I will pour out my Spirit and my blessing," we read in the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, " upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto

the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.” This is a beautiful picture of a Christian household. Would that it were true of all our families! Each one of us can do much to bring about such blessedness by faithfully following St. Paul’s advice to his spiritual son Timothy: “*Be thou an example* of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

BETHEL REVISITED.

SATURDAY AFTER THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him.”—Gen. xxxv. 6.

IN revisiting Bethel after many years Jacob's heart overflows. The memory of God's goodness is very precious. Here in his youth, a homeless wanderer, he dreamed of heaven, and the vision never faded. Here God promised to be with him, to keep him, to give him bread to eat and raiment to put on, to bring him once more to his father's house in peace; here Jacob vowed, “The Lord shall be my God.”

“Who dreams of God when passionate youth is high,
When first life's weary waste his feet have trod?
Who seeth angels' foot-falls in the sky,
Working the works of God?
His sun shall fade as gently as it rose.”

Jacob acknowledged the faithfulness of the Lord, the promise-keeping God, and looked forward doubting not that the God of Bethel would still go with him, keep him, feed him, and bring him in peace to the grave and gate of death and to the Father's house beyond.

For others Bethel might be only a bleak hillside; to Jacob it was the holiest of shrines. To him its inanimate rocks and trees and springs were endowed with the power of speech. He assembled his household, related once more the story of his Ladder-vision, pointed out the

spot where his head rested when he was in dreams, and erected an altar which he dedicated with becoming solemnities.

When Jacob told his children the meaning of Bethel, deeply moved by the sight of his emotion, they may have had thoughts which find expression in the lines of a living poet:

“ I saw the Syrian sunset’s meteor crown
Hang over Bethel for a little space ;
I saw a gentle wanderer lie down
With tears upon his face.

“ Sheer up the fathomless, transparent blue,
Rose jasper battlements and crystal wall ;
Rung all the night air pierced through and through
With harps angelical.

“ And a great ladder was set up the while
From earth to heaven, with angels on each round ;
Barks that bore precious freight to earth’s fair isle,
Or sailed back homeward-bound.”

It is not difficult for us to imagine Jacob’s own feelings upon his return to Bethel. There are places which hold records of our lives. Each one of us can point to houses, streets, streams, hills, or other inanimate objects that tell tales of what we have said and thought and done in their presence ; which are vocal though voiceless and have marvellous power to awaken memories of the past and are pleasurably or painfully suggestive according to the record we ourselves have made upon them. This is, perhaps, the explanation of the universal tendency to personify everything around us. Children utter passionate words to stones or blocks or pieces of furniture from which they have received an injury, and strike them, as if these

things could hear and feel and respond. When children grow up and are about to leave their childhood's home for years, perhaps forever, they often move among the rooms and through the grounds, uttering farewells as though these silent and emotionless things could feel the sorrow of parting and could reply with some farewell of their own. Another illustration of this tendency to personify the inanimate may be seen in the religions of the cultivated Greek and Roman civilizations, wherein the grander objects and phenomena of the universe are represented as divinities, living and possessing human passions. In one form or another, in every land, everything with which humanity has had association has been pictured as making record of the association and somehow responding to the emotions of the human heart. Our blessed Saviour found this thought and habit among the people with whom He lived and labored while on earth, and in His sermons made the trees and fields and flowers vocal, leaving His earthly life impressed upon every place and thing which He approached. The hills, plains, valleys, towns, and waters of Palestine are to this day alive with the story of the Lord's earthly life. Bethlehem, Jerusalem, the Temple, the tomb of Lazarus, Jacob's well, the River Jordan, the Sea of Galilee, the brook of Kedron, Gethsemane, Calvary—all these speak of Christ and will continue forever to repeat the story of the events of which they were the silent witnesses.

We, too, for our part, are writing our own history on the objects around us and among which we pass in the journey of life. Each life, each turning-point of life, can be connected with certain houses, schools, churches, or objects of the world of nature. A short list of the names of such things and places would give the outlines of your

life and mine. Jacob's history could be condensed into less than a dozen words — Hebron, Bethel, Padan-aram, Gilead, Mahanaim, Peniel, Shechem, Ephrath, Dothan, the land of Goshen.

What we want, then, is such an association with inanimate things that they shall utter words of hope and cheer to us whenever we revisit them. Doubtless Jacob tried to impress this lesson upon his household. His joy in revisiting Luz, which is Bethel, was undimmed by the remembrance of any sin committed there. There his sin was forgiven. There he saw the heavens opened. Of Bethel he could say :

“ But at Luz God came to me : in my heart
He put a better mind, and showed me how,
While we discern it not, and least believe,
On stairs invisible betwixt His heaven
And our unholy, sinful, toilsome earth
Celestial messengers of loftiest good
Upward and downward pass continually.”

What vivid impressions of the great experience which came to their father in his youth at Bethel Jacob's children must have received while he related it upon the very spot ! It may be that some of them lay down upon the stones that night hoping to see for themselves a similar vision. How often have we also longed for some vivid sight of the open heaven or for the sound of a voice from the eternal silences — and longed in vain ! The golden ladder did not lower again at Bethel.

“ Ah, many a time we 've looked, on star-light nights,
Up to the skies as Jacob looked of old ;
Looked longing up to those eternal lights
To spell their lines of gold.

“ But never more, as to that Hebrew boy,
Each in his way the angels walk abroad ;
And never more we hear, with awful joy,
The audible voice of God.”

Still the same heavens are there, the same Father looks down and sends the same messengers of love upon like errands of love to all who look upward in faith.

“ Yet to pure eyes that ladder still is set,
And angel visitants still come and go ;
Many bright messengers are moving yet
In this dark world below.

“ Thoughts that are red-crossed Faith’s out-spreading wings,
Prayers of the Church, aye keeping time and tryst,
Heart wishes, making bee-like murmurings,
Their flower, the Eucharist.”

These and many other such like aspirations are the burdens of ascending angels, while other blessed messengers whom faith’s eye “ alone can scan ” are ever descending from the throne of grace.

When Jacob revisited Bethel he found that the place bore its imperishable record of his past. That fact he would be anxious to have his children apprehend. That lesson is for us also. The office, the shop, the mill, reflect our work there. The chamber where we sleep, the streets we walk in, utter in our ears the loves, the purposes, the deeds, formed or wrought within them. The room where you joined in family prayer in childhood; the altar before which you made your first communion; the grave of your first-born; the place of business or pleasure where you resisted the grace of God; the house in which you committed a deed of wrong or of shame, when fierce passions assailed you—each of us can point

to some such place bearing our own life-records. Re-association with these scenes always brings the old memories back to life. Those memories will not die. They will go with us to the Seat of Judgment.

THREE GRAVES.

MONDAY AFTER THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“But Deborah Rebekah’s nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak.”—Gen. xxxv. 8.

“And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.”—Gen. xxxv. 19.

“And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days : and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”—Gen. xxxv. 29.

AFFLICTION followed close upon Jacob’s rededication of his life to God at Bethel. He is now to be taught that sorrow purifies and refines the soul. The higher life he longs for is to be won only at the cost of tears. He too must be enabled to count it among his foremost spiritual blessings that his “heart has bled.” “Many secrets of religion,” says Jeremy Taylor, “are not perceived until they be felt, and are not felt but in the day of a great calamity.” Longfellow said, “It has done me good to be somewhat parched by the heat and drenched by the rain of life.” Horace Bushnell could write, “I have learned more of experimental religion since my little boy died than in all my life before.” The three deaths recorded in the chapter before us to-day brought home to Jacob some of these holy lessons.

But we are not for a moment to suppose that Jacob’s loved ones were taken from him to purify Jacob’s soul. That would be a horrible thought. If Jacob had believed that, his loss would have been a curse and not a blessing. In that case his dear ones would have been dealt with

arbitrarily, unjustly. No; God did not take them to help Jacob become a better man nor because Jacob loved them too dearly. Two of the deaths took place in advanced age and were in the course of nature; the other we cannot explain, for Rachel died suddenly and in her youth — could we explain it we should be as God, and there would be no room for faith, or even for prayer; but we may rest assured that God, who knows the end from the beginning, dealt generously, lovingly, with Rachel; that in the wisdom and will of God her time had come. Nevertheless, it was a gracious Providence which called Jacob to meet affliction at a season when he was in a state of grace, fortified by high resolves, far more equal to making such submission to the will of God than ever before in the whole course of his life, and also at a period in his career in which the softening influences of a great grief could accomplish most effectually their blessed work upon his heart and mind. We are told that our Lord learned obedience by the things which He suffered. In Passion Week our attention is directed towards that supreme grief which purchased our salvation. The story before us of a human heart wrung by an anguish God-given befits the week and may help us to penetrate some little way into the mystery of those Divine sufferings which were at the same time most truly human and common to man.

Jacob was first called upon to mourn for Deborah, his mother's nurse. When his mother, Rebekah, came as a bride to the Holy Land, faithful Deborah, who had suckled her in infancy, accompanied the bride and remained a member of the household so long as her mistress lived. When Rebekah died this warm-hearted old woman made her way somehow across the desert wilds to

find a refuge with the son whom the mother loved and trusted. It is one of the highest compliments Jacob ever received, an unexpected revelation of his kindness and sympathy and of his power to inspire confidence in those who knew him best, that this shrewd and loving old nurse turned to him, not to his father, Isaac, nor to his brother, Esau, in her helpless old age to seek a protector and a home. In fact Jacob was ever trusted by women, trusted more than loved, for intellectual strength is not in itself lovable, and when joined to spiritual insight seldom awakens passionate attachments. Neither did any woman ever have cause to reproach Jacob or ever receive at his hands other than the most courteous and chivalrous treatment.

Deborah, the old nurse, served her people for love, not for pay; she was rewarded, it is pleasant to read, according to her merit. In this country such relationships are rare. Schoolhouses, electric lights, hotels, are unfavorable to the growth of these lifelong attachments which are equally honorable to the household and to the dependant. Where it is possible to retain such a faithful old heart in the home it is a great loss surely, a great sin probably, to break the tie which has strengthened itself in the memories of the years. Under the "Oak of weeping" Jacob buried Deborah at Bethel; and his home was never quite the same again. Her "wise and happy old face" would greet him no more upon his return from the cares and labors of the day; there was no one else who "called him by the pet name of childhood;" and Jacob wept for a true friend as well as for the faithful old nurse who had cheerfully given her life's affectionate service to his family.

Soon afterwards Jacob departed from Bethel to visit

his father Isaac, and on the journey Rachel, the light and joy of his life, was taken from him. She who had said, "Give me children, or I die," is now to know "the misery of a granted prayer." As her "soul was departing" she named her new-born son "Ben-o-ni, the son of my sorrow," but Jacob, for her encouragement, and because he would not give up hope while there was life, called him "Benjamin, the son of my right hand." The narrative lingers not, the fatal words are written, "And Rachel died." Jacob buried his beautiful and beloved wife where she died, in Bethlehem Ephrath, and her grave is known to this day.

"And Israel looked upon his Rachel wanned,
Like a white flower beneath long summer rain,
So she with sweat of child-birth her thin hand
Laid on the counterpane.

"Near Ephrath there 's a pillared tomb apart;
It casts a shadow o'er her where she lies
As she a shadow o'er her husband's heart
Of household memories."

Rachel is ever spoken of as the mother of the chosen people, and typical of the Church, the Bride of Christ. She was buried apart from other members of the family in Bethlehem where Christ, the true Israelite, was born; and there in her grave she is represented as weeping for her children, the Holy Innocents, who were slain for Christ's dear sake. Jacob restrained his grief, bore it manfully, and in faith, but his heart was broken. The story of his constant love for Rachel is one of the most beautiful things in all literature.

"For ne'er was wife, poor Rachel! loved like thee."

In his daily occupations and companionships the chieftain of the tribe, silent, alert, masterful, ready for any emergency, would have shown no outward evidence of the romance which illumined his inner life. But the poetry and the ideals of life he found in Rachel. His love came to him at first sight. The fourteen years of toil seemed short because of it. It grew with the years and never wavered. When he was dying, half a century later on, her name was on his lips: "I lost her; as I was in the way she left me." For the time he forgets all else and couples her name with the name of God: "I remember God, and I remember Rachel that died." As has been said many times, Jacob's visions at Bethel and at Peniel, together with this pure, constant, unselfish love for Rachel, connect him with all that is highest and noblest in the experiences of the human race.

The death of Isaac, Jacob's father, is also recorded in this chapter. He lived for some time after Jacob reached his home; and his closing years were comforted by the presence and care of his descendants, his faith strengthened by Jacob's conversation, his riches, and his twelve sons, the future heads of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Esau was summoned to his death-bed, and the twin sons, reconciled and dutiful, followed Isaac to the grave.

Henceforth Jacob looked beyond the stars not only for his God and the angels of God, but also for his own loved ones. Earth held his chief treasure no longer. Where his treasure was there his heart turned more and more. We too have sorrowed. We too have loved ones we have lost awhile. Let us not forget them. In shame we sometimes feel that we are neglectful of them. The blessed doctrine of the Communion of Saints is too little

known or accepted. In our prayers and meditations we should call up the faces of our dead. The thought of them will shield us from temptation and help us to set our affections on things above.

THE SALE OF JOSEPH.

TUESDAY AFTER THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver : and they brought Joseph into Egypt.”—Gen. xxxvii. 28.

IN most lives there are long years of peace and sufficiency. After Isaac's death Jacob succeeded his father as the recognized head of the chosen family; his earthly ambitions were realized and he lived in peace with God and man. The sale of Joseph by his brothers, related in the text, broke the even tenor of these uneventful years and exercised a powerful influence upon the future destinies of Jacob and the Jewish race. To-day we are to consider the providences by which Joseph was sold into Egypt.

It was providential, that is certain; a providence long prepared, carefully worked out, and, although using the evil of men's hearts as its instrument, in the end a blessed providence. Joseph was sent into Egypt in order to prepare the way for the migration thither of all his father's household. But why, in the Divine purposes, was this change of habitation desirable? Religious writers have given two answers. First, Jacob's family, increasing so rapidly in wealth and numbers—ceasing to be a family, becoming a tribe, a large and powerful tribe—could no longer remain in safety in the Holy Land. Too weak to conquer the land, in a collision with the fierce and heathen natives, Jacob's family would be exterminated.

And such a conflict was imminent. In Egypt the tribe could grow into twelve tribes, into a nation, separate, uncontaminated, under the protection of a friendly monarch. There was another reason for the sojourn in Egypt. From the highest civilization of the ancient world with its refinements and proprieties and laws, its schools of science and of art, its manufactures and mechanics, these untaught plainmen would acquire much which would go into the entire warp and woof of the future Jewish nation. And Joseph was the man chosen and sent before them. In the familiar story of this destined one's entrance into Egypt and his career there we are able to trace God's own thought and purpose.

Jacob's favoritism was the chief thing which turned the brothers against Joseph. It has been conjectured that in manner and appearance the lad "was a perfect picture of his mother Rachel." We are told that "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, and made him a coat of many colors." There is some disagreement as to the meaning of the word translated "coat of many colors," and scholars have been disposed to rob us of our childhood's picture of Joseph arrayed in his rainbow-hued coat and to substitute in his place a youth clad in a priestly tunic of white, or in a long flowing garment also white, reaching to his hands and feet. Recent researches and discoveries, however, as in so many other instances, have led to a return to the old rendering, and "coat of many colors" is now generally accepted as admissible, probably preferable. This coat, a garment such as was generally worn "by the ruling classes, by those who had not to work with their hands," indicated that his father had chosen Joseph to be the future chieftain of the tribe. For this reason his brothers

“ hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him.” They hated him also because he told tales of their misdoings; although we may suppose that he only answered his father’s questions and told the truth. And they hated him yet more because of his dreams, afterwards fulfilled to the letter: “ I have dreamed,” he said, “ that we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.” Again he dreamed that “ the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance unto him.” This increased his brethren’s hatred and envy; “ but his father observed the saying.”

Joseph hated, the next act in the tragedy opens. One day his father sent him to visit his brothers who were feeding the flock in Shechem, and when they saw him coming over the hills they conspired against him, saying one to another, “ Come let us slay him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams!” Reuben, the first-born, probably in command, was the only one who did not in his heart consent to the murder. He urged them not to kill the lad, but rather cast him into an empty cistern and let him die,—intending to rescue him “ and deliver him to his father again.” It was agreed. When Joseph drew near they seized him, stripped him of his many-colored coat, and cast him into the pit. He was but seventeen years old, helpless in the hands of ten grown men. The deed done, they sat down near the mouth of the pit and ate and drank, feasting perhaps on the dainties their innocent victim had brought them as a present from home. Reuben soon withdrew to attend to some duty of the day or to devise a plan of rescue. During his absence a caravan of merchantmen was seen

approaching, and Judah made the suggestion that they should sell the dreamer as a slave; the pit was opened, the captive drawn out and sold for twenty pieces of silver—two for each brother,—the usual price of a slave under age, thirty pieces being the value of a full-grown man. When their guiltless victim was led away into a cruel slavery had they baffled his dreams? On the contrary, they were helping to bring them to pass.

In the evening, wavering, unstable Reuben stealthily visited the pit and found it empty. He took it for granted that the ten had slain Joseph and concealed the body. Reuben received no portion of the twenty pieces of silver, did not know of the sale, and believed that his brother was dead.

“ Sold by them that should have loved thee,
Wearing graciously thy glory
Through the land thy wisdom won;
How should Christians read thy story,
Aged Israel's favored son?”

Can we fail to read in it of Him, beloved of the Father, whose brethren said, “ This is the heir, come let us kill Him;” whose “ own received Him not;” delivered for the price of a slave; rising from the pit to the throne; whose Passion won for brethren who hated Him deliverance and a “ better country ?”

The coat of many colors was dipped in blood and carried home to Jacob, who “ knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him.”

We know why Joseph was sold into Egypt. There are other important lessons in the narrative. Jacob believing his son dead, sorrowing for the vacant place in his home, acknowledges that he is being punished for the

sins of the past. He who had deceived his father is now deceived by his own sons. Those who make light of sin, think it easily forgiven, its consequences not to be feared, can glean no encouragement for their assumption from Jacob's history.

But the discipline of the parting was good both for the father and for the son. It made a man of Joseph. In his father's house he was in grave danger of being spoilt by favoritism; in Egypt he was forced to depend upon himself; it was sink or swim; the anguish, the temptation, and the toil strengthened his moral nature, sharpened his ambition; and in Egypt he reached far higher earthly honors and gained far profounder religious experiences and attainments than ever would have been possible in his own land.

The loss was also good for Jacob. Taking his trouble to God he would be taught that this grief was not only a chastisement for sin but also the answer to earnest prayer for higher spiritual privileges and acquirements. Do you sometimes long for the saintly life as Jacob did just before his loss? Do you sometimes pray to be made a better Christian? That may be a dangerous longing and a perilous prayer. For some of us the furnace of affliction might be the only possible answer.

Jacob, let us also remember, was a student of the ways of God as well as of the ways of men. He would say to himself, "Either all is chance, and, if only chance, unworthy of a man's grief, too insignificant to set this keen old brain of mine at work upon; or else God is, and reigns, and all is well. If God is on the throne, whatever happens to Joseph, whatever the pain of my own heart, the ordering must be just and right, designed for good, consequently endurable." Thus to the true believer days of

darkness are growing days. And so God gives us tears. To submit to the dispensations of Providence is the evidence of our faith in God and in His love. Benjamin Franklin, near the end of his long, eventful life, more or less under the influence of French infidelity, said: "The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth that God governs in the affairs of men." Jacob and Joseph, when they met again in the palace of the Egyptian King, could say that, could say furthermore, "now we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

THE FAMINE-TIME.

WEDNESDAY AFTER THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children : Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me.”—Gen. xlii. 36.

IN the sorest of the famine-time Jacob murmured. In his dejection he lost his faith. Although he was becoming an old man his complaints are not to be excused as merely the querulousness of old age. His mind was clear, his eye undimmed, his reign over his tribe supreme. Such strong old men rule the world; always have; always will. That Jacob was not in his dotage appears from his manner of meeting the famine when first the dearth fell upon the land. His sons, grown men, with families of their own, folded their hands and waited either for rain or for death. But Jacob was ready for action. He did not know that the famine was an ordained agent to bring him to Joseph and the land of Goshen; therefore he would fight the famine. In his staunch old heart he was so far from regarding the situation as hopeless that in the confidence of his own resources he addressed his sons with a sarcastic gentleness: “There is corn in Egypt; I have money; you have youthful strength for the journey; go and buy; ‘Why look ye one upon another’ in despair?” It is clear that the old man’s brain is not senile, and that he “has been eying this condition of incompetency and cowardice on the part of his sons with some curiosity and with some

contempt and now breaks in upon it with his 'Why look ye one upon another?' It is the old Jacob, full of resources, prompt and imperturbable, equal to every turn of fortune, and never knowing how to yield."

From childhood we have all known the story of the journey of the brothers into Egypt; of their meeting with Joseph, who instantly recognized them, although they knew him not, arrayed in splendor and grown to manhood; of Joseph's eager inquiries for his father and little Benjamin his mother's son; and of his order that no more corn should be sold them if they failed to bring Benjamin with them when they came again. In the text we are told that upon their return with the message Jacob's heart sank. He did not believe them. He was troubled with many thoughts. After Joseph was lost the patriarch turned to Benjamin, Rachel's other son, and he made him the favorite. Notice, in passing, that the brothers gained nothing by their sin against Joseph. They disposed of one favorite, the object of their hatred and envy, only to find another and less acceptable "little ruler" set up in his place.

Jacob had seen famine-time before. It may be he hoped the present supplies would hold out until rain fell; but day after day dragged on; the dearth and drought grew worse and worse; the corn of Egypt was consumed; the cattle were dying, his grandchildren crying for bread. Must Benjamin go? Then it was that Jacob's faith failed. God had forgotten to be gracious. For the first time in his life murmurs, murmurs of despondency and doubt, framed themselves upon lips that were wont to utter prevailing prayer. His sons urged him to let Benjamin go. But he would not yield. "My son," he replied, "shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is

left alone; if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." Notice also the injustice and petulancy of his rebuke to Judah: "Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?" To all the brothers he uttered the lament of the text: "Me have ye bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: All these things are against me." We are not told that he prayed for guidance or even for deliverance. His faith had failed. At length, however, he was forced to act, and yielding to Judah's plea, and placing this son of Leah in command, he said, "Take Benjamin, 'Arise and go unto the man' and buy more corn."

In Jacob's despairing cry, "All these things are against me," we may hear the expression of our own faithlessness in seasons of depression, worry, or doubt, and the rebuke it receives. All these things were really for him, not against him. The saying was false. Joseph was alive, ruling in Egypt. Simeon was safe with his brother. No evil should befall little Benjamin. The famine was his friend, not his foe; it was designed to force him away from Canaan and its dangers into the safety of Goshen by the Nile bank. All these things were working together for his good. But he knew it not, believed it not; therefore he worried, complained, despaired. If he has endured many chastisements and tribulations in the past this is the culmination of them all, for now he finds no help in his God. We can imagine his forlorn condition. All his sons are absent and in danger. During weary days and weeks he waits, watches, and suffers, "a prey to fears, suspicions, surmises." There were no postmen, no telegraph wires.

And he found no help in looking upward. In losing faith for the time being in the goodness of God he experienced in all its bitterness the misery of hope deferred as he waited, imagining and conjuring up misfortunes the direst, torturing himself with weary worryings.

St. Paul exhorted the Philippians, "Be careful for nothing"—Be full of care for nothing; or, more literally, In nothing be anxious. That is to say, "Do not fret or worry or borrow trouble. Don't cross the bridge before you come to it. Live by the day. Trust God for the morrow. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'" Yet we worry and at seasons fail to see God's love and care for us in our distress. In Jacob such a state of mind indicated a fall from grace; and to this day it is, in all who give way to it, an unfailing evidence of spiritual declension.

"All things are against me and worse will come." This is the general form of the disease. In foreboding fears we look forward, anxiously anticipating some evil day, some insurmountable difficulty, some overwhelming calamity—we know not what. These galling and needless self-tortures canker and as they grow eat out the life of faith. How true is the old saying that the misfortunes hardest to bear are those which never happen! Nevertheless, we worry, although we know that the worrying does no good, and that it is the deadliest foe of human happiness and usefulness.

In thinking of our circumstances we often fall into dejection. "If we had this or that; if things were different!" Those who have property worry for fear of losing it; those who have none fear that they may come to want. We worry on our children's account, over their present and their future, and our disquietude is accepted by them

either with amusement or with anger, rarely with gratitude. We worry, too, over our health. The patent medicine advertisements which describe symptoms are far more eagerly and widely read than the novels of the season. Our aches and pains, our prospects of an early grave — these form an unfailing and fascinating subject of conversation, when we can secure a hearer. To take care of our health is undoubtedly a Christian duty; to worry about it, to think of it constantly, is the surest way to break ourselves down. No slave of worry lives long. Jacob shortened his life by this folly and died a quarter of a century younger than Isaac, his calm, even-tempered father. It is worry, not work, that kills.

Then, too, anxiety turns inward and we worry about our religious state and standing. Sometimes we say, "I wonder if I am a true Christian? I long to know by some sure sign or proof, 'Do I love the Lord or no?'" And such evidence not being granted, we anxiously ask, "Am I His, or am I not?" More frequently we question the love of God. Jacob felt that the Lord had forsaken him. There are problems in our life and in the life of the world we cannot solve. How can God love us when He permits the evil, the pain, the inequalities, the injustices we see on every hand? How can we know that God is, hears us, loves us? What are the proofs of life beyond the grave? In Jacob's case, because we know the end of God's plan for him, we can say that he should have prayed, put his trust in God, taken his mind off himself and his perplexities, busied himself with the work of his plantation, leaving the issue with the Almighty. In our own anxieties we have these resources and more; for Jacob had not, as we have, the assurances of Him who is the revelation and the representative of the Father.

The word and the promise of Jesus Christ should support our faith. Mere human philosophers at the best can only tell us "not to put on our cloaks in midsummer because we may need them at Christmas." But we believe that Jesus Christ once lived upon earth and that we have His words. The difference between His utterances and the wisdom of all other philosophers is so marked that He is everywhere acknowledged as a master. Were He only a man there is every reason why we should accept His words. We yield to authority in art, science, surgery, mechanics. In His sphere He is the recognized authority. And He said, over and over again, that there is a future life for man; that God, who cares for the birds and feeds them and provides raiment for the lilies, will much more care for His own children, made in His own image; and His constant question of rebuke was, "How is it that ye have no faith?"—no faith in the goodness and power of God, no faith in an eternity so soon to come, wherein all wrongs will be redressed, all tears dried. But He was God as well as man, proving His Divinity by His works, by His Cross and Passion, by His glorious Resurrection from the dead. To lack faith in Him and His repeated assurances that God loves and cares for us, that trials and difficulties are evidences of His love, is inexcusable.

In due time Jacob discovered that all these tribulations were *for* him and not *against* him. Let Passion Week be at once the rebuke of our faithless worries and their cure.

THE WAGONS OF EGYPT.

THURSDAY AFTER THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived : And Israel said, It is enough ; Joseph my son is yet alive : I will go and see him before I die.”—Gen. xlv. 27, 28.

IN famine-time Jacob lost faith in the loving-kindness of the Lord. He felt that God was against him, and his faithlessness found expression in the language of despair. Little Benjamin and all his sons on the long and dangerous journey for the corn of Egypt — the old man brooded in solitary sadness, seeing no smiling face behind this “frowning providence.” In the narrative before us to-day we learn how Jacob recovered his lost faith and found his lost son Joseph.

1. One morning the old chieftain is awakened from his stupor of gloomy foreboding by the announcement that his sons are returning from their long journey. He receives them in his chamber; eagerly he embraces little Benjamin; anxiously he counts over the names of the ten. They are there, all safe and well. Corn is in their sacks and on their faces the light of a great joy. As best they can they break the joyful tidings: “Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.” When he heard their words “Jacob’s heart fainted”—his heart grew chill or seemed to cease its beating, “for he believed them not.” More than once in the past these sons had deceived him and now he naturally suspects another falsehood. The brothers go over

the details of their story. They speak of Joseph's royal rank and rule. They rehearse his words. Especially would they dwell upon the fact that he had forgiven them for selling him. Joseph said, they all declare, "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. It was not you that sent me hither but God."

Jacob still refused to believe them. Then they would show the presents Joseph had given them and sent to him; with childish delight Benjamin would exhibit his "three hundred pieces of silver" and his "five changes of raiment." The money and the fine clothes making some impression, the brothers besought their father to come to the door and see the chariots of Egypt. Yielding to their entreaties he left his chamber, and, in the artless and pathetic words of the Scripture, "when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived." The numbness and coldness left his heart, "and Israel said," for with his awakening faith his new name is restored to him again, "It is enough! Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go down and see him before I die."

When Jacob saw the wagons of Egypt his faith revived. So to-day there are many who find in the objective proofs of religion great aids to faith. An answered prayer, poetical justice upon an evil-doer, a special providence, the outward and visible signs of the sacraments—these are encouragements to believe in God. And to each of us come many marks and tokens of another country, conveyances not of this world's manufacture, proofs of the existence and love of a Ruler in that land.

2. Losing no time, "Israel took his journey with all that he had." No sooner were his doubts of God

dispelled than his mind resumed its wonted activity. As he journeyed he thought of the unsearchable wisdom which had brought these strange things to pass, and he realized, as he had not at first, that this journey into Egypt was a momentous undertaking and would be fraught with unending consequences. His longing to see Joseph was intense. But Canaan was the Holy Land; Egypt was a land of idols; there, too, he might become a subject and be no more a prince. Therefore, when he reached Beersheba on the very borders of the great desert, the last halting place in the Promised Land, while it was yet possible to return, he acted the part of Israel and sought an interview with his Divine Friend. He offered sacrifices, asked forgiveness for his season of distrust, returned thanks for the preservation of Joseph, and besought guidance for the future. Whenever the believer earnestly sets himself to the work of praying that his duty may be made clear, light falls upon his pathway. It was so with Jacob. He received a definite and gracious answer: "In the visions of the night" he seemed to hear a voice saying, "Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes," shall close thine eyes in death. All doubts being thus removed the caravan proceeded on the journey.

3. At this point in the narrative we are given a list of the names and numbers of Jacob's household. His company consisted of twelve sons and seventy souls, thus reminding us of the twelve Apostles and seventy disciples sent forth by Jesus Christ. The ancient commentators remark that Jacob's household at once began to increase almost miraculously, and was, in this growth, prophetic

of the increase of the Twelve and the Seventy, the Christian Church, sent from the Holy Land into the heathen world. In each instance the grain of mustard seed became a mighty tree. Of the literal Israel Moses said in his day, "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with three score and ten persons, and now the Lord thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude." Of the spiritual Israel, soon after its work began, we read in the book of Acts that there were "three thousand believers," and again of "many thousands of Jews that believed;" while at the end of the second century Tertullian declared, "We have filled the world."

4. In due time the travellers approach the capital city of Egypt. The old leader, remembering his duty to his followers, restrains his impulsive eagerness for the sight of Joseph's face, calls a halt, and acts with his accustomed prudence and caution. The famine has reduced him to poverty; he comes, virtually, as a suppliant; but he will make no needless confession of weakness. He assumes the attitude of a prince who is accepting the invitation of another prince. With all the state possible he sends forward Judah to notify Joseph and Pharaoh of his arrival and then awaits, as an equal, the honors of a courteous welcome. It was well done. To have advanced unheralded through the streets of a foreign city would have been unsafe and undignified. The description of the meeting of father and son after the cruel separation of twenty-two years is beyond comment. "And Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father — and he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while."

5. The story of Joseph, while but an episode in the history of his greater father, nevertheless in its record of

the providential opening of the land of Egypt contains much to strengthen our faith. The chapters which narrate the career of Joseph in the ancient metropolis of the world introduce many Egyptian words and phrases into the Hebrew Scripture and abound in allusions to the social and political customs of that country at a specified period in its history. Now, modern students are digging up the old capital and have deciphered many of the writings on its bricks and stones. These Egyptologists, many of them, hold no brief for the Bible, yet they admit that its references and allusions in these chapters are correct. Furthermore, they tell the German school of critics, which rejects the Mosaic authorship and assigns the narrative to the time of the kings of Israel, or later, that these words and phrases do not fit the date they have surmised. The precise date of the document, or its authorship, could never be a vital matter to any well-instructed Churchman. Our attitude toward all such questions should be one of frank desire for the truth. We do not fear facts. We welcome truth and seek the light. The Creeds of the Church leave us free to accept all discoveries of modern science, study, or research. But the truth is that the scholars who are digging into the remains of ancient Egypt find much to corroborate the traditional or accepted view of the date and authorship of the chapters before us, nothing to render that view untenable.

Another help to faith is the designed or undesigned likeness of Joseph to Jesus Christ. It is not necessary to assert that the old writer was conscious, or fully conscious, of that resemblance; but we can see it in its beauty and we are edified by it. Take one point only in that likeness. Let us see how Joseph, feeding his breth-

ren in famine-time, shadows out the gifts of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion. Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, "Zaphnath-paaneah," meaning "The Saviour of the World," or "The Bread of Life." He to whom this name was given fed his brethren at his own table in his own house; He who is the true Bread of Life feeds us with the bread and wine of His own sacrament in His own house, and we sup with Him and He with us. Joseph also gave his brethren provisions for the way; our Joseph says to us, "Strengthen yourselves with the Bread of Life now whilst you are in the way; arise and eat of My flesh and drink of My blood, because the journey is too great for thee." In Goshen also he fed and nourished them, thus reminding us of that true land of Goshen wherein the Lord Jesus Christ feeds His brethren at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and reveals Himself to them face to face.

Let us remember, too, that while the bread of old which Joseph gave his brethren, like the manna, nourished only for a season and had no promise of the life to come, the Body and Blood of the Lord on Christian altars has in it the seed of immortality, according to the most sure promise of the Lord: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die; if any man eateth of this bread he shall live forever."

THE LAND OF GOSHEN.

FRIDAY AFTER THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee : The land of Egypt is before thee ; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell ; in the land of Goshen let them dwell.”—Gen. xlvii. 5, 6.

THE Pharaoh of Joseph's time is set before us in a most attractive light. He is represented as a strong man, honorable and generous, a wise ruler, a King who believed in his own religion and sought to govern his life by its precepts. It was a gracious Providence which placed the future fate of Jacob's family at the disposal of such a monarch, for he was willing to give them the best of the land.

In the passage before us for our exposition to-day, the forty-seventh and the forty-eighth chapters of Genesis, we have an account of Jacob's interview with Pharaoh in the King's palace, a brief record of the settlement of the chosen family in the land of Goshen, and then we are told of the blessing which the patriarch bestowed upon the two sons of Joseph. Let us follow these three natural divisions of the narrative.

1. Tradition has designated the Pharaoh before whom Jacob appeared as “Apepi, the last great King of the Hyksôs dynasty,” and this identification is accepted by Canon Rawlinson and other authorities. When he signified his readiness to give Jacob audience, Apepi was surrounded by princes and courtiers and royal guards. At

the signal Joseph, the Grand Vizier, magnificently apparelled, as became the "Governor over the land," advanced towards the throne escorting his father through the double rows of guards. The old man probably retained the simple dress of his native hills but he bore himself with "all the dignity of a Great Sheikh whom no outward display of courtly grandeur could disconcert." As he walked by Joseph's side he may have said to himself, "Would that Rachel were here, if but for a moment, to witness her Joseph's greatness." The old chief-tain must have been gratified by his reception and dazzled by the magnificence of the scene, but he gave no outward sign of the impression made upon him. With perfect self-possession he stood before the greatest King of the age. The Prince of the world and the Prince of God were face to face! The things seen and temporal and the things not seen and eternal had here their living representatives. Joseph intended to manage the interview. Doubtless he expected that his father, according to the usage of the court, would prostrate himself before the throne, receive a royal greeting, and at once withdraw. The Psalmist tells us that Joseph bound the Egyptian princes at his pleasure and taught their senators wisdom. We know that he was a shrewd politician as well as a far-seeing statesman and that he was now in the prime of all his powers. But Jacob waves aside his distinguished son. He himself is the great man of the company. He stands erect. He has no prostration to make. On the contrary, he raises his hand to bless Pharaoh as the less is blessed of the better. Thus the old hero, conscious of his own greatness, calmly assumes the superiority. And the chief prince of the world humbles himself before this strong old man of God. As a modern preacher has said,

a "spiritual grandeur invested this aged and weary pilgrim, and drew the likeness of a crown around his brow as he stood before the Egyptian King. Aged he was, and bowed, and sad, and weary. He halted, too, as one who has been sore wounded in the battle of life." There were furrows on his brow, and lines in his cheek, "eloquent of tears and cares," while the intellectual light upon his face was somewhat dimmed by the shadows of a suffering life. As a prince having power with God and man Jacob stood before Apepi and prevailed. The King recognized the patriarch's spiritual power, accepted his blessing, and graciously entered into conversation with him. "And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?" Jacob replied, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." The narrative does not continue the conversation. We must assume, however, that there followed some discussion of the terms upon which Jacob's family should settle in the land of Goshen and a final ratification of those terms. Once more Jacob blessed the King, and, leaning upon Joseph's arm, left the throne-room with a heart overflowing with gratitude and triumph.

2. After Pharaoh's consent had been secured we are told that Joseph settled his father and his brothers in the fertile and well-watered land of Goshen. "And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly." The narrative is also careful to state that Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, and we remember that Joseph was just seventeen when he was sold away from his father. Thus Joseph nourished and protected his father in his old age through as

many years as his father had cared for him in his childhood. In many respects the closing years of Jacob's life were his best and happiest years. His children were around him and his peace was made with God and man. In the land of Goshen something must have come to him of that conviction to which a great English writer, J. R. Green, has given expression: "What seems to grow fairer to me as life goes by is the love and grace and tenderness of it—not its wit and cleverness and grandeur and knowledge, grand as knowledge is; but just the laughter of little children, and the friendships of friends, and the cosy talk by the fireside, and the sight of flowers, and the sound of music." But in Goshen Jacob also found employment for his energies of mind and body. He superintended the settlement of the land, and took in hand the delicate task of maintaining amicable relations with the Egyptian power on the one border and with the barbarians of the desert on the other. Above all, Jacob had the opportunity of impressing his own personality upon the lives and destinies of his descendants. Rarely has any man, in any age, had such an opportunity to mould the future of a nation, and never, surely, has it been so nobly and so successfully improved. In that even-tide of peace and prosperity he was graciously spared to accomplish a great work for his people, to know that

"Something ere the end,
Some work of noble note may yet be done ;"

but over and beyond all, these last years must have given the seal of completion to that "work of noble note" which the God of the birthright had wrought in Jacob's soul. The sorrows of the past, some of which his own

sins or the sins of others had brought upon him, would work their perfect work of refinement and purification. As he thought of these sorrows in seasons of meditation he must have marvelled at the grace which had supported him through them all. The Jewish rabbis speak of the "seven" afflictions of Jacob: the persecution of Esau, the injustice of Laban, the lameness received from the angel at Peniel, the dishonor of his daughter Dinah, the loss of Joseph, the imprisonment of Simeon, and the departure of Benjamin for Egypt. But his sorrows were more than seven. To the list given we might add the loss of his property in famine-time, the moral and mental failure of Reuben his first-born, and the chiefest of all his sorrows, the death of his youthful wife Rachel. But in the evening of his days in the land of Goshen Jacob could say, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble; having sowed many harvests in tears, I now reap in joy."

3. When "the time drew near that Israel must die" he gave repeated expression to his resignation and thankful appreciation of the goodness of God under all the dispensations of His providence. He ordered that his body should be buried in the Holy Land. Then he called for Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, laid his hands upon their heads and blessed them in the beautiful words which to-day we may consider in one aspect only, namely, as an expression of his own thought of the Lord his God: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." In these words Jacob bore his testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord. All the vicissitudes as well as all the joys of a long, eventful life are counted by him to be proofs of the goodness and love of God. The

promises made him at Bethel have been kept. His God is the promise-keeping God. He acknowledges that the guiding hand of his Heavenly Father has led him through all dangers, fed him all his life long, and that the angel of the Covenant has redeemed him from all his sins.

If now while it is called to-day we also live in the same loving faith that all our temporal needs shall be provided for and that we shall be redeemed from all our sins, then our last end may be like Jacob's; and in that hour which must surely come to each, we know not how soon, we may have the same blessed assurance and be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." "To me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

THE TWO SONS OF JOSEPH.

SATURDAY AFTER THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads."—Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

THE mountain streamlet flows on unceasingly towards the great deep. We see here the working of a law of nature. The streamlet cannot but obey the law. Yet we almost feel as we watch it go leaping and bounding along that it loves its course and knows its true home. The largeness and freedom that are before it seem to lend to it their charm, and you would not persuade it if you could that it will be lost in the vastness to which it is hastening. The ocean claims it for its own, and the streamlet seems to love to be thus claimed. It should be the same in human life. The love and the knowledge of God are for the lives of His children and it is a law of our nature that we should go to Him.

For years Jacob's life has been turning in the direction of the Divine and now the end is near. When God wrestled with him at Peniel it was significant that the great struggle in which he gained the name of Israel, the Prince of God, took place upon the banks of a mountain streamlet called Jabbok, for Jabbok means "the wrestler." This stream was probably so named because it wrestled and struggled and turned upon its course in forcing its passage through the rocky hills which stood in its pathway. Thus in its name as well as in itself the stream

was an emblem of Jacob's life. For the stream and the life flowed on to the deeps. Sometimes, too, the most tumultuous waters will find a last level ere they reach the sea and flow on calmly to mingle with its strength and peace. So the wrestling brook of Jacob's life found at last a quiet haven in which to rest ere it flowed out to its final home in the mighty deep.

The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which recounts the triumphs of faith on the part of the heroes of the Old Covenant, selects the incident before us as the most striking illustration of Jacob's faith in God. "By faith," the chapter declares, "Jacob when he was a-dying blessed the two sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." Why does the New Testament thus emphasize this blessing?

In the first place it was a formal adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh. "They shall be mine," as my own sons, said the patriarch. These two sons of Joseph were no longer to be Jacob's grandsons, but his own sons, and were to take their places as heads of the Tribes of Israel. Joseph was not to be represented by a tribe bearing his own name; he was to be honored above his brothers by having two of the Twelve Tribes named Ephraim and Manasseh. This adoption brought the present number of the tribes up to thirteen, but the original and symbolical number of twelve was subsequently secured once more by the removal of the tribe of Levi from secular employments and possessions when the Levites were set apart to the priestly office. By faith Jacob, in this act of adoption, conferred upon his favorite son Joseph a double portion of the inheritance and invested him with the primogeniture which weak and sinful Reuben, the first-born, had forfeited. The birthright was, therefore,

divided, its temporal advantages being assigned to Joseph, its spiritual privileges to Judah, to whom was made over the honor "of being the next connecting link in the chain of grace, leading on and down to the coming of the Saviour." Christian teachers have always spiritualized this adoption of Joseph's sons. They have seen in it a foreshadowing of that adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father;" an adoption by which the redeemed are made inheritors of the Kingdom of Christ, whereof He Himself is the true and rightful heir.

It is to be noticed also that as Jacob worshipped leaning upon the top of the staff with which he passed over the Jordan in his lonely youth, there was in his face and manner some such overwhelming manifestation of faith that Joseph yielded to it and made that faith his own. His sons through their Egyptian mother, Asenath, took rank with the nobility of the land. This connection together with their father's great political power would have opened the highest position in the realm to Ephraim and Manasseh. But Joseph, a clear-headed man of the world, was ready to sacrifice these prospects in order to secure for his sons an inheritance of which Jacob's faith in the promises of God was the sole guaranty and title deed. His father's faith that in the land of Canaan his descendants should become a rich and powerful nation conquered every doubt in Joseph's mind, and without hesitation he consented that his sons should be numbered among believers and give themselves up to the service of the God of Israel. He brought the lads forward and caused them to kneel, the elder at Jacob's right hand, the younger at his left. But Jacob crossed his hands, placing his right hand upon Ephraim's head and his left hand upon Manasseh's head. This "displeased Joseph,"

who said, "Not so, my father: for this is the first-born; put thy right hand upon this head." Jacob, however, had made no mistake. He had read correctly the characters of the lads; furthermore, he was Divinely guided. He was free from the weakness and wilfulness which his own father, Isaac, had displayed under similar circumstances. "I know it, my son, I know it," he replied to Joseph, "he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he." While they knelt thus before him, with his arms forming the sign of the cross, the patriarch bestowed upon the young men the blessing of the text: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads."

In the next chapter Jacob seems to use a three-fold name for God, and this benediction certainly takes a triple form.

When Jacob said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk," he called upon the name of the one true eternal God. The young men must forget the idols of Egypt. The God of Israel, the God of all gods, should be their God. "And," added the patriarch, "let my name be named upon them"; henceforth forever the God of the Covenant shall be known as the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the *God of Jacob*; Jacob added his own name to the name of the God of his fathers.

"The God which fed me all my life long unto this day." The word translated "fed" means more than provided with earthly food and drink. It is a word which signifies performing the duties of a shepherd. The God

which "shepherded" me all my life long. David sings, "The Lord is my shepherd," but Jacob first conceived and gave utterance to that "metaphor which has survived temple, and sacrifice, and priesthood, and will survive even earth itself; for 'I am the Good Shepherd' is true to-day as when first spoken by Jesus, and the 'Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them,' and be their Shepherd, when the flock is carried to the upper pastures, and the springs that never fail." Jacob had been a shepherd all his life long. In his speech to Laban he gave a vivid description of the cares and dangers of such a calling. But he loved the shepherd's life, and one day as he watched the flock he said to himself, "All that I do for the sheep God does for me in an infinitely greater measure. He supplies all my wants, guides, guards, loves me. I am the shepherd of these sheep; the Lord is *my shepherd*." And it was Jacob upon whom first flashed this thought which has cheered and refreshed the heart of the world.

"The Angel which redeemed me from all evil." The word for "redeemed" is the same word which is used by Job and quoted in the Burial Office, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Much has been written of this old Hebrew word; we cannot err, however, in saying that the Goël to whom "both Jacob and Job looked forward, and of whom both Moses and the prophets did testify, was Christ." We know assuredly that He is our Redeemer.

In this Holy Week before us our thoughts will be directed to the redemption purchased for us on Calvary. In that great fact of our religion the Good Shepherd became the Lamb of the Passover; Himself the Priest, Himself the Victim. Putting aside all theories and all

controversies concerning the atonement the Christian heart may confidently rest upon the short, simple, yet sufficient declaration of St. Paul, " Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

UNSTABLE AS WATER.

MONDAY BEFORE EASTER.

“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”—Gen. xlix. 4.

THE forty-ninth chapter of Genesis has ever been considered one of the great chapters of the Bible. When Jacob assembled his twelve sons about his death-bed he uttered a prophecy which he declared should cover the centuries unto the “last days.” The remaining books of the Old Testament are occupied with the fulfilment of the destinies here predicted, while the heavenly city which St. John beheld in his vision “had twelve gates, and the names written thereon” were “the names of the Twelve Tribes of the Children of Israel.” That Jacob’s prediction in this remarkable chapter should furnish most helpful and suitable themes for Holy Week meditations will surprise none who have read the chapter attentively.

The words of the text, “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,” were addressed to Reuben, the first-born. His mental and moral failure cut him off from the blessings of the birthright. There is here primarily a reference to Reuben’s unrestrained passions, which are represented as boiling and bubbling like water in a caldron or a gushing spring; but “unstable,” unsteady, inconstant “as water” is an accurate description of the man’s character as a whole. Indecision and vacillation marked each important act in his history. When the brothers conspired to kill Joseph, Reuben’s instability appeared. He was

in command and he made a stand against the murder. He seemed to be the only one of the company who displayed natural affection or horror of bloodshed. There was a tender spot in his heart for the little Dreamer. He was the brother, too, who had greatest reason for hating the lad, for the favorite seemed destined to supplant him in the chieftainship of the tribe. And so there was much goodness and self-sacrifice in the heart of the man who desired to save little Joseph. "No," said he, "we will not kill him, we will cast him into a pit and let him die." But he intended to rescue the lad. At the first opportunity he would remove him secretly from the pit and "deliver him to his father again." Reuben here revealed his weakness. He wished to act generously and do what was right, but he lacked the courage and the energy to carry out his purpose. Even the plan of rescue, devised in a feebleness which could not face the determination of the ten brothers, failed because of its author's instability, for, thinking that there was now no immediate danger, he went away to attend to other matters, and while he was absent the ten sold Joseph to the merchantmen of Midian. Reuben, nevertheless, might have saved his brother. He was in command. Had he manfully and resolutely asserted his authority the ten would not have dared to disobey him. But Reuben had not sufficient strength of character for the emergency and showed himself "unstable as water."

The Gospels for Holy Week bring before us a Reuben of the New Testament. In the Passion of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Roman governor who pronounced the sentence of death was as "unstable as water." Pontius Pilate wavered, hesitated, and failed. In his struggle to save the innocent Christ, the true

Joseph, he was that "double-minded man" of whom St. James speaks, "unstable in all his ways; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." Water is the very image of vacillation and indecision of purpose. Whether we observe it in the waves of the sea driven by the wind and tossed; in the quiet lake reflecting the last object impressed upon it, moon, stars, foliage, or face of man; taking readily the mould and form of the vessel into which it is poured;—it is ever fickle, incapable of standing alone, powerless to resist the pressure of external forces. When a man is "as weak as water" he is a pitiable creature. Alexander the Great, when asked how he had conquered the world, replied, "By not wavering." Philip van Artevelde's words express the universal sentiment:

"All my life long
I have beheld with most respect the man
Who knew himself, and knew the ways before him,
And from among them chose considerately,
And, having chosen, with a steadfast mind
Pursued his purpose."

Pilate's purpose was to escape the guilt and dishonor of pronouncing the death sentence upon an innocent man. St. Peter, in the book of the Acts, tells us that Pilate "was determined to let Him go." But he did not pursue that purpose with a steadfast mind. The story of the changeable moods in which he resolved, hesitated, vacillated, resolved anew, and finally yielded, is a tragedy in itself.

Pilate, like Reuben, however, was a man who claims our admiration and our pity as well as our condemnation. He had led the rough and careless life of a soldier, a life

of self-indulgence. But there is enough on record to show that he was a man of some education and refinement; naturally just, generous, attractive; a gentleman, according to the code or standard of his race and rank. He was the sixth governor-general sent to Jerusalem since the Roman conquest, and from the beginning his administration had been unpopular and unsuccessful. At the ceremonies connected with his assumption of office there was a riot, and up to the present time three formal indictments had already been lodged against him in Rome. He knew that another serious uprising of the people would probably cost him his office.

After our Lord's condemnation in the palace of the high priest He was dragged through the streets to Pilate's judgment hall. The leaders of the mob demanded an order for the execution of the Prisoner. They expected no difficulty or delay, for they knew that Pilate was afraid of them. The governor took in the situation at a glance. He perceived that it was for envy they had delivered Jesus and he recognized the fact that the Prisoner was no common criminal. Now the Roman law called for justice—stern, unpitying justice, it is true—still it called for *justice*. The governor was under oath to administer justice, and it was a famous saying among the judges and administrators of that old Roman Empire, "Let justice be done though the heavens fall." Pilate's honor was at stake. All his manhood was aroused as he faced the mob and demanded, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" thus boldly declaring that he refused their unlawful demand and intended to give the Prisoner a fair and impartial hearing. And so the trial began; a trial which was in reality nothing more than a trial of Pilate's stability of purpose and of character.

The governor certainly made most strenuous efforts to save the Lord Jesus Christ from the cross; six times at least in the course of the trial he endeavored to set the Prisoner free; three times he pronounced officially, "I find no fault in this man." But the chief priests held to their purpose. Since the conquest their council could not inflict the death penalty and the crowd, already becoming turbulent, fiercely demanded, "Let Him be crucified." Then the frightened, wavering judge asked a second private interview with Christ. The Prisoner might confess. At any rate it would give the judge a moment's respite. But somehow the Lord's presence and words awakened in Pilate thoughts of the unseen, and he was the more afraid. At this crisis, when conscience and all that was best in him pleaded for Christ, his wife's message reached him. Claudia Procula was his best friend, a sensible, gracious woman, and he loved her. Dreams, too, were regarded by the Romans with the utmost veneration. Had his wife's dream no "divinely sinister" significance? As he once more faced the mob, what must have been the thoughts of Pilate's heart? Should he yield? Should he dishonor his office and his manhood? "No!" he seemed to have said to himself, "I will stand firm! I will heed the voices of wife, of conscience, and of the gods!" But at that fateful moment the leaders of the mob made their final move, and won. They raised the cry, "If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar's friend!" At the mention of that "dark and terrible" name, at the thought of the "ulcerous features" of Tiberius, his "poisonous suspicions," his "desperate revenge," Pilate's resolution tottered and fell. He called for water, unstable as himself, washed his hands of blood, and gave the sentence.

We know that Pilate's weakness in this trial was the chief cause of his subsequent downfall. Instability of purpose is fatal to temporal success of any kind. For Christians, however, the words of the text have a special significance. When we were confirmed, when we made our first communion, did we not resolve to be steadfast? We thought we should never waver. "By-path meadow" had no attractions; our course should be "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But must we not confess that we have been "unstable as water," unstable in prayer, in faith, in loyalty to the Church; hot, and cold, and lukewarm, each in turn, in our devotion to Jesus Christ! To-day let us say, "O Crucified Lord, I would renew my steadfastness, I would love and serve Thee to the end."

THE SCEPTRE OF JUDAH.

TUESDAY BEFORE EASTER.

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.”—Gen. xlix. 10.

IN the blessing of Judah Jacob reaches the climax of his prophetic predictions. The primacy of Israel is here bestowed upon faithful Leah's fourth son. In the significant words of the text there is certainly the “announcement of a Personality, mysterious, ineffable, sublime, which dwarfs all others — as Mont Blanc the lesser elevations of his mountain realm.” Before that Personality, seen by faith, the dying patriarch “bows in worship,” while his withered face is illumined “with a light not born of earth.”

In this prophecy, which is generally accepted as Messianic, Jacob foretells the future fortunes of Judah and of the tribe which Judah founded, and in his words we may also read of Christ of whom they give us a true and pleasing picture. The prophecy, as will be noticed, takes a poetical form :

“Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise :
Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies ;
Thy father's children shall bow down before thee.
Judah is a lion's whelp :
From the prey, my son, thou art gone up :
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
And as an old lion ; who shall rouse him up ?
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,

Until Shiloh come ;
And unto him shall the gathering of the people be,
Binding his foal unto the vine,
And his ass's colt unto the choice vine ;
He washed his garments in wine
And his clothes in the blood of grapes :
His eyes shall be red with wine,
And his teeth white with milk."

You will observe that this prophecy has three divisions, each of which takes up and repeats the " happy name of Judah."

1. In the first division we are told how Judah shall be regarded by his brethren, and how he shall deal with the foes of Israel. " Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy father's children shall bow down before thee." Jerusalem, the capital city of the Holy Land, was located within Judah's borders, and David and Solomon were sons of his tribe. The word *Jew* was also derived from his name. The name Judah means " praise," or " praise to God," and so there is a play upon the word, " Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." It has been pointed out that the angel's song for Judah's son, Jesus, " Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace," in the Hebrew might have been, " Judah in the highest, on earth Shiloh." And Jacob's words may be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. " Thou art He whom Thy brethren shall praise." Judah's son David said of Christ, " Prayer shall be made ever unto Him, and daily shall He be praised;" and we sing, " Praise Him all creatures here below." " Thy father's children shall bow down before Thee " are also words which we may ascribe to Him of whom it is written: " All kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall do Him service;" and " at His name every knee shall bow."

Of Judah's enemies it is predicted that his "hand" shall be in their "neck." The tribe of Judah should fear no foe and triumph over the enemies of Israel. But we remember that "Jesus stretched forth His hand" against sin, death, and hell. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool," for "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet."

2. In the second part of the prophecy Judah is set forth as the lion of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. In future years the lion became the battle standard of the royal tribe of Judah. In the Revelation St. John identifies Christ as the One of whom Jacob here prophesied and calls Him "the lion of the tribe of Judah." In the words, "From the prey, my son, thou art gone up," Jacob may be interpreted as addressing the suffering and conquering Christ: "Thou, my Son, art gone up on high; Thou has led captivity captive; Thou hast bound the strong man, Satan, and hast spoiled his goods; Thou hast come forth as a conqueror from the grave, and death is swallowed up in victory." The phrase, "He stooped down," is especially descriptive of our Lord's humiliation in His Passion and the depths of suffering into which He descended on the Cross, where, as St. Paul says, "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross;" but from that "stooping," from that "couching down," the Lord has "gone up;" "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted" the crucified and risen Christ, "and given Him a name which is above every name."

3. The third portion of Jacob's prediction concerning Judah begins with the words, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet,

until Shiloh come." This passage is not without its difficulties, critical and exegetical. In Holy Week we will take what is certain.

Shiloh is a "mystic" word, a word "coined by Jacob," and it has a "hundred meanings." Primarily it means the *Rest-Giver*, the *Prince of Peace*; so for us it is one of the precious names of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "Until Shiloh come the sceptre shall not depart from Judah." A cautious and learned modern commentator, Canon Rawlinson, does not hesitate to say that this "prophecy may be considered as fulfilled by the continuance of Judea as an independent kingdom until Rome established her dominion over it by the appointment, in A.D. 8, of Coponius, the first procurator." In the year of our Lord 8, Shiloh had already come, the Babe of Bethlehem. But it is not necessary to claim a literal fulfilment for this, or for the later prophecy that David's seed should sit on the throne for ever and ever. The heart of the prophecy is a precious certainty. In any case the Jewish nation lasted, the Jewish Church lasted, until the coming of Christ. This is a fact of history. To-day, in the truest sense of the words, David has an heir who will sit on the throne forever, "and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end." "Unto Him," continues the prediction of Jacob, "shall the gathering of the people be." Our Lord shall be the "Desire of all nations," He shall "gather together in one the children of God," for He Himself has promised to gather all His sheep together so that "there shall be one fold and one Shepherd."

The concluding clauses describe the fruitfulness of the region which should be assigned to Judah in the land of Canaan. The vines should be so strong that asses could

be tied to them, and grapes so abundant that wine should be as plentiful as water. But the words, " Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine," have reminded holy men that " foal " and " ass's colt " are figures of the Gentiles as " the vine " is a figure of the Jewish Church. The Psalmist said of the Church of the Old Covenant, " Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt," and again, " Thou God of hosts, look down from heaven, behold, and visit this vine." In the New Testament our Lord represents His union with His Church as the union of a vine and its branches. And so on Palm Sunday in the remarkable fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, " Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the *foal of an ass*," a further fulfilment of Jacob's words has been seen, for Christ advanced to His passion in order to " tie the foal unto the choice vine," binding the Gentiles to the privileges of Israel. As St. Augustine (quoted by Bishop Wordsworth) says: " ' He bound His foal unto the vine ' when He rode on the colt to Jerusalem, and prefigured the bringing in of the Gentiles to the Church of God. He ' washed His garments in wine; ' in the wine of that Blood which was shed for the remission of sins. He is the bunch of grapes which was suspended on the wood. He washed His robes, and the robes of His Church ' in the blood of grapes. ' ' His eyes are red with wine, ' for His saints are filled with holy joy. ' His teeth also are white with milk, ' for babes in Christ are " nourished by Him.

" *Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.*" Let these old words concerning the promised Shiloh sink into our hearts this day. He Himself said, " I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me." Once He was lifted

up on Calvary's Cross. During Holy Week throughout the world that Cross is again lifted up. Unto Him is the gathering of the people. No man in Holy Week can entirely escape the remembrance of the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This holy season preaches Christ crucified to multitudes who never enter the doors of the church. Now, however, He is especially lifted up before the eyes of the believer. Thou, O Lifted-up Redeemer, hast said Thou wilt draw all men; O draw me! The power of Thy Cross has changed the world; O may it change me! O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and precious Blood hath redeemed us; save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

GRIEVED BY THE ARCHERS.

WEDNESDAY BEFORE EASTER.

“The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him : But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob ; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel :)”—Gen. xlix. 23, 24.

THE text is a portion of Jacob's prophetic blessing upon his favorite son, Joseph. The dying patriarch has a blessing for each of his twelve sons, but when he reaches Rachel's first-born, his heart overflows in words of pride and praise. In glowing and exuberant language he tells of Joseph's triumphs over all his foes in the past and foretells for him the richest future happiness and prosperity; yet the greater part of this blessing is history rather than prophecy. In the words of the text the patriarch certainly speaks of the sufferings his son has endured and of the Divine strength imparted to him, by which he was enabled to triumph over those who hated him. Whatever is prophetic must be said of another; and it is impossible to read the words without thinking of Another, even the Lord Jesus Christ. The theologians of all schools agree in making the life and character of Joseph a foreshadowing of Him who was to come. The greatest of the Christian poets have also seen in Joseph a picture of Christ. Newman opens his beautiful sonnet on Joseph with these words: “O purest semblance of the Eternal Son.” Isaac Williams says:

“Thus, sweet-souled Joseph, as thy life ran on,
Each scene disclosed anew th' Eternal Son.”

To-day let us consider the sufferings described in the text. Are not the words as true of Jesus as of Joseph? "The archers have sorely grieved Him, and shot at Him, and hated Him." Recall some of the chief points of the resemblance. Joseph was the son loved of the father; so was Christ. The dreams of Joseph which foretold the bowing down of his brethren before him remind us of One greater than Joseph, at whose name "every knee shall bow." Joseph was "sorely grieved by the archers," he was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" he was hated by his brethren and stripped of his raiment, even as Jesus Christ was, and cast into a pit as a dead man; he was one, as the Evangelical Prophet said of Christ, whose garments "were dyed in blood." His brethren, "moved with envy," sold him to the Egyptians for the price of a slave; and the Jews, "moved with envy," delivered Christ who was also sold for a price. Joseph was sorely grieved by the archers of temptation in Potiphar's house, but he did no wrong; Christ, too, was tempted in the wilderness, yet was "without sin." Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned, while the True Joseph was "accused by false witnesses," and "numbered with the transgressors." In the dungeon Joseph was "as a dead man out of mind," and was numbered with "two malefactors," the butler and the baker, to one of whom he promised life, and to the other, death. On the Cross our Lord was hanged between two thieves, one saved, the other lost; and in the dungeon of the grave He was "free among the dead." But each was raised from the pit to rule in royalty. Truly of Joseph it may be said,

"Type thou art of One more holy,
Who His glory laid aside,

Took the form of servant lowly,
Stooped to suffering man and died.

“ He was scorned and sold and hated
By the men He came to save,
With a cruel wrath unsated
Followed to His three-days' grave.”

Joseph's history after he rose from the grave of Potiphar's dungeon is as prophetic as the story of his sufferings. He “ is raised on high among the heathen,” as Isaac Williams has said, “ saving life and giving bread, the bread that saveth from death; setting forth Him who giveth the true bread from Heaven; married to a daughter of Egypt, as Christ's Bride, the Church, is taken from among the Gentiles; then receiving his brethren as ‘ one alive from the dead,’ with words like those of our Lord Himself after His Resurrection, when they were ‘ troubled at His presence,’ and ‘ supposed that they had seen a spirit,’ but Joseph says, ‘ Come near me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother.’ ”

The words of the text, “ The archers have sorely grieved him,” are fulfilled in the sufferings of Christ as they are brought before us in to-day's Gospel. All the archers of evil have shot at Him, and hated Him. The story of His agonies of mind and body occupies a large part of the four Gospel narratives. Above all He was grieved with the wounds of an arrow whose sharpness we know not nor can imagine, when the Lord God “ laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

“ But his bow abode in strength;” the Lord Jesus endured the sorrows of the Cross because “ the arms of His hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God

of Jacob." Here was one name for God, but the patriarch added two other names and gave his God a triple name,—“ The mighty God of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.” These names were each taken up by future writers of Holy Scripture, explained and expounded; and they have made for themselves a permanent place in religious literature.

The Mighty God of Jacob.—In this personal appropriation of God, Jacob could cry, “ My Lord, and my God,” as Christ could say, “ O my Father”; even as each Christian heart can speak of One who “ loved me and gave Himself for me.” This name for God was never forgotten by Jacob’s descendants. How often do we read in the Psalms of the “ God of Jacob”! “ The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Our Lord Himself used this name as a proof of a future life when He said, “ As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye never read ” that long after the burial of the three great patriarchs God revealed Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and “ God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” And we know that in His Passion our blessed Saviour was strengthened by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

The Shepherd.—Once before Jacob had spoken of the “ God which shepherded me all my life; ” he thought of the Lord as his shepherd long before David wrote the twenty-third Psalm. The figure may be found in many later books of the Bible. “ Behold the Lord God shall come with a strong hand; He will feed His flock like a shepherd,” declares the prophet; and to-day we see the Good Shepherd of souls ready “ to lay down His life for the sheep.”

The Stone of Israel.—Jacob here coined another precious word which will never die. “Trust ye in the Lord forever,” said Isaiah, “for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,” or as the Hebrew is rendered literally in the margin of our Bible, “in the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of Ages;” and our Lord said, “Did ye never read in the Scripture, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head-stone of the corner?” And of the cleft rock in the wilderness the Epistle to the Hebrews declares, “That rock was Christ.” In a great sermon upon this text Dr. Maclaren says: “At one end of the long chain this dim figure of the dying Jacob, amid the strange vanished life of Egypt, stretches out his withered hands to God the stone of Israel; at the other end, we lift up ours to Jesus, and cry:

“ ‘Rock of Ages! cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.’ ”

To-day the Church brings before us the complete fulfilment of the prediction of Genesis. On the Cross we do see Him whom “the archers have sorely grieved,” the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see Him “made strong” to submit to the agonies of the Crucifixion “by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.”

He was the true Joseph who in Jacob’s words “was separate from his brethren.” That separated One is our Brother, and He is grieved for our sakes, in order that He may bear our griefs. As we think of that Cross each pardoned Christian soul, remembering how once it was stricken by the archers of sin and healed by Him who had Himself been hurt by the archers, can reverently repeat the singularly beautiful words of Cowper:

“ I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
Long since ; with many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew,
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One, who had Himself
Been hurt by th’ archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars ;
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live.”

The Task, Book III.

THY SALVATION.

THURSDAY BEFORE EASTER.

“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”—Gen. xlix. 18.

IN the midst of his prophetic blessings upon the Twelve Tribes of Israel Jacob uttered the ejaculation of the text. Why he paused for prayer at this particular point in his speech we do not know, and the exclamation of the text is open to various interpretations; but there can be no doubt that the salvation he waited for was the last and chiefest blessing of the Lord. As the patriarch lay dying the prophetic ecstasy was upon him. Already he has seen a vision of the Shiloh unto whom should be the future gatherings of the people. He was a man of prayer, the Prince of God, the Prevailer, and so we must recognize in his dying prayer the highest aspiration of a spiritual master and victor.

For many years Jacob had set his affections on things above and his present utterance was a fulfilment of the promise that “the righteous hath hope in his death.” He now waited for salvation, he looked forward to a “better country,” a clearer, fuller revelation, “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” “‘I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord,’” he says; “I have experienced a large measure of the blessedness of that salvation, for the God of my fathers has shepherded me all my life long unto this day, and the Angel of the Covenant hath redeemed my soul from all evil; yet there is much that is dim and vague. Behold,

I die; my spirit will soon return to God who gave it; and there, in the waiting-place of the departed, I shall know and see, and Thy full salvation shall be revealed to me in the face of Him who is thy Salvation and my Saviour."

Now in the first chapter of his first Epistle St. Peter alludes to the ejaculation of the text, and we may well turn to his comment upon the salvation of the Lord as the Christian interpretation of Jacob's words. The Apostle speaks of salvation as a complete and eternal deliverance from all sin and from all imperfection: "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." St. Peter would include Jacob among the prophets who inquired and searched diligently—who thought, meditated, prayed, and earnestly endeavored to comprehend the meaning of the revelation given unto them to utter concerning the salvation of the Lord. The prophets of old time, moreover, foretold that this salvation should be accomplished and secured by "the sufferings of Christ." The true Joseph must be "sorely grieved by the archers." The Holy Spirit which was in the prophets testified beforehand to a salvation won by a suffering Messiah. A suffering Saviour, declares St. Peter, is the main theme of Old Testament prophecy. In his sermon in Solomon's porch the same Apostle repeats this assertion: "Those things which God before had shewed by the mouth of *all* His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled." And St. Paul, in his speech before King Agrippa, declared

that he had said “ none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come : that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead.” Our Lord Himself on the day of His Resurrection expounded to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus the things concerning Himself, “ beginning at Moses and all the prophets,” saying, “ ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory ? ”

In his reference to the salvation for which Jacob longed, St. Peter teaches not only that the salvation of the Lord was purchased in the past on Calvary, but also that by His Passion and Crucifixion our Lord won for us a present and a future salvation. Concerning salvation in the world to come, he says that the faithful are begotten again “ to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Our Lord has gone to prepare a place for us. The blessedness of eternal life is ours. That final and completed salvation is ready to be revealed to each believer.

But this salvation, past and future, is also, the Apostle declares, a present salvation : “ Whom having not seen, ye love ; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory : receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” The tenses are present. The souls of believers are saved now. As St. Paul says, “ By grace ye *are* saved through faith.” And this salvation, past, present, and future, was wrought for us by the sufferings of Christ, our blessed Lord and Saviour. Of that salvation Jacob’s exclamation in the text is a prophecy, “ I

have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." In the fervent words of the devout William Law: "Salvation! It is the work for which Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and lived on earth, and died on Calvary, and descended into the grave, and burst the bonds of death, and mounted to heaven, and sits on the right hand of God. For this He reigns and prays on high. It is the work for which the Spirit seeks our earth, and knocks at the barred entrance of the sinner's heart. For this He assails the fortress of self-love, and reveals the perils of sin, and wrestles with ignorance and vain excuses. Salvation! It is the first message which mercy uttered to a ruined world. It is the end of every prophecy, the purpose of every precept, the beauty of every promise, the truth of every sacrifice, the substance of every rite, the song of every inspired lip, the longing desire of every renewed heart, the beacon which guides through the voyage of life, the haven to which the tides of grace convey, the end of faith, the full light of hope, the home of love!"

Furthermore, as a prophet Jacob would personify the Salvation of the Lord. His exclamation in the text reminds us of the words of another aged saint of God. Simeon, who chanted his *nunc dimittis* in the temple, had also waited for the salvation of the Lord; he had "waited for the consolation of Israel." But unlike dying Israel he was to see the reality and not the vision only, for "it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Accordingly when he clasped the Holy Child in his arms he cried, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Having waited in faith he could now say of the Infant in his arms, "This is Thy

Salvation!" But Simeon as a prophet saw yet more; with "all the prophets" he foretold the sharp sword of suffering which should pierce both the Saviour and the saved.

As we meditate upon the salvation of the Lord, made ours by the death of Christ upon the Cross, that salvation which Jacob and all the prophets longed for and foretold, that salvation won in the past, our present possession, our hope of glory in the eternal future, can we fail, on this Maundy Thursday, to accept and make our own the grateful words of the Psalmist: "What reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that He hath done unto me? I will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." The Psalm which contains these words was part of the Hallel sung by our blessed Lord and His Apostles on the night of the institution of the Holy Communion, when He gave them the Cup of Salvation in His Blood. And so upon this Thursday which commemorates the celebration of the First Eucharist, O blessed Lord and Saviour, I will meditate upon Thy love in giving that Feast of Salvation unto Thy Church; with Thy help I will prepare for my own Easter Communion, and on that holy day with all the faithful throughout the world, "I will receive the Cup of Salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." As I kneel before the Easter altar to receive Thy gift, I will not forget that it is also written: "Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation."

"O Love, who once in time wast slain,
Pierced through and through with bitter woe,
O Love, who wrestling thus didst gain
That we eternal joy might know:
O Love, I give myself to Thee:
Thine ever, only Thine to be.

“ O Love, who once shalt bid me rise
From out this dying life of ours :
O Love, who once above yon skies
Shalt set me in the fadeless bowers :
O Love, I give myself to Thee ;
Thine ever, only Thine to be.”

HE YIELDED UP THE GHOST.

GOOD FRIDAY.

“And yielded up the ghost.”—Gen. xlix. 33.

WE are naturally inclined to be indifferent to that which is familiar. In the northern parts of Europe the sun does not rise for six months in the year, but when he does appear after his long sleep the people who dwell in those far away lands welcome him with exuberant delight. They climb to the summits of the great rocks which overlook the northern sea and sing psalms of thanksgiving to God for the reappearance of the king of day. The sunrise is a great event because months have passed since last it was seen. With us, however, the sun rises every morning in the year and the dawn is such a commonplace matter that we scarcely give it a moment's consideration. So it is with the familiar certainties of life. The great truths are so well known that we neglect and forget them. Some of the essential facts which men and women are prone to put aside are brought before us most vividly on Good Friday.

One of the facts which the death of Christ emphasizes is the certainty that we too must die. And we know so well that we are mortal that we forget the fact. We even seek to forget it, and seem to live as though we were to live here forever. To-day, then, let us face this contingency and try to realize the end which awaits us all. In yielding up the ghost our blessed Lord submitted to the lot of every child of Adam. Death reigns.

We must die. Over each one of us will be said, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." There is no escape; "all heads must come to the cold tomb." The grave yawns, your grave and mine. Yet how seldom when in the enjoyment of health do we reflect upon the grave and gate of death—our own death, our own grave! It has been said that we never know the meaning of death until death comes to one we love. Of most of us the saying is true. In youth we heard of death, read of death, saw the hearse, the graveyard, the funeral procession; but when death came to our own home, then, for the first time, we understood its awful significance.

The death mentioned in the text will help us to think of our own dying day. If we have found the life of Jacob a fruitful and edifying Lenten study, surely, now at the close, as we behold him yielding up the ghost, we may say, "Let my last end be like his." He died in faith, in charity with all men, and he had "hope in his death." Beginning life with an inborn love for the things of earth rarely exceeded, still he set his affections on things above; and after a lifelong struggle to subdue the evil within him, won the crown of righteousness and died forgiven and victorious. In Jacob "patience had her perfect work." Gradually, under the discipline of a loving Heavenly Father's hand, he was changed from Jacob the Supplanter into Israel the Prince of God. But you say, "When Christ yielded up the ghost on Calvary He was more than man and He could say with an assurance which passed beyond faith, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit;' when Jacob yielded up the ghost he was an old man with little more to live for, and he was one of the greatest of the saints; I am only human, and very human; I have not attained unto Jacob's years

or Jacob's faith, and the thought of my own death crushes and overmasters me." The fear of death, however, which is natural, cannot furnish a valid excuse for refusing to give it consideration. All living creatures fear death. As has been said: "The senseless, dumb creature, the sheep, the ox, will tremble as he sees death at his side. This shrinking, this horror of great darkness, comes even to the animal which has no sense of sin, no dread of doom. And why? Because death and life are at eternal enmity. Man was made for unity, and death means destruction. Man was made for beauty, and death means corruption. Man was made for health, and death means fatal disease. If you know what it is to live in God — if you know what it is to feel that within you there are powers and capacities the exercise of which produces infinite delight: if you know what pure, unselfish affection is, — if you have really entered into the charm of life — then you have shrunk with inveterate loathing from death." At the grave of Lazarus our blessed Lord groaned in spirit and was troubled. He trembled with human horror as the shadow of death approached Him in Gethsemane. And this thought of death frightens us all. Its inevitableness also adds to the fear which it inspires.

"The black camel Death kneeleth once at each door
And a mortal must mount to return nevermore."

That grim messenger will come for me. I must go with him; I must go alone. No human companions can share my journey. The grave with its loneliness, its silence, its worm, awaits my body. I must leave this world, my work, my pleasure, my goods, and be no more seen. Henry Kirke White's lines seem wrung from the very heart of humanity:

“ Yes, I must die—I feel that I must die,
 Yet do I feel my soul recoil within me
 As I contemplate the dim gulf of death,
 The shuddering void, the awful blank futurity.

“ And it is hard
 To feel the hand of death arrest my steps,
 Throw a chill blight o’er all my budding hopes,
 And hurl my soul untimely to the shades,
 Lost in the gaping gulf of blank oblivion.”

To him one of the saddest thoughts of death was that he should be forgotten by the bright world of which he then seemed a vital part, that soon he should be “ lost in the gaping gulf of blank oblivion.” But probably for most of us the chief alarm caused by the thought of the grave is the conviction that death does not end all, that we must each one appear before the Judge of all the earth to give account for the deeds done in the body. For how many would death be robbed of its sharpest sting should some Divine hand write over the entrances to all our burial grounds what infidelity once wrote on the portal to Père la Chaise Cemetery, “ Death is an everlasting sleep ”! But in the sleep of death, perchance, we may dream, perchance, awake—“ Ay, there ’s the rub ! ” Yes, there is something in the human breast which forces us to set our seal to the declaration of Holy Scripture, “ It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” On this one day in the year let us think seriously of these things and so prepare to meet our God. The earnest words of Canon Liddon will help us to realize what it is to die and to meet God : “ Every man who believes that God exists, that he himself has a soul which does not perish with the body, knows that a time must come when this meeting will be inevitable. In the hour

of death, whether in mercy or in displeasure, God looks into the face of His creatures as never before. The veils of sense, which long had hidden His countenance, are then stripped away; and as spirit meets with spirit without the interposition of any film of matter, so does man in death meet with his God. It is this which renders death so exceedingly solemn. Ere yet the last breath has fairly passed from the body, or the failing eyes have closed, the soul has partly at any rate, entered upon a world entirely new, magnificent, awful. It has seen beings, shapes, modes of existence, never even imagined before. But it has done more than that. It has met its God as a disembodied spirit can meet Him." Prepare, then, to meet thy God. Prepare to meet Him in death, prepare to meet Him in judgment. That judgment, demanded by the moral sense of mankind, is revealed in the Word of God, "For God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead." "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless

we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

May God grant that when each one of us shall have served Him in our generation we may be gathered to our fathers having the testimony of a good conscience; in the communion of the Catholic Church; in the confidence of a certain faith; in the comfort of a reasonable, religious and holy hope, in favor with our God, and in perfect charity with the world; and hear the voice of the Crucified saying, Come, ye blessed children of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world!

THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH.

EASTER EVEN.

“In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place.”—Gen. xlix. 30.

THUS Israel gave commandment concerning his burial. Although he knew that Joseph's power could secure interment for him in the most magnificent of Egyptian tombs he would nevertheless make his grave in the land of promise. The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Jacob was one of those “who died in faith.” He believed the promise made to Abraham and to Isaac that Canaan was the inheritance of God's people, a land in which they should rule and worship, the land of the coming Shiloh, a land which was the type and promise of the Promised Land beyond the grave. Therefore he charged his sons, “Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah;” for “there,” he continued, “they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.”

To the ancient commentators it seemed not without a poetical and spiritual significance that Jacob's new name of Israel, which he won in the wrestling at Peniel, con-

tains "the first letters of the names of the other five" who were buried in the cave of Machpelah—Isaac, Sarah, Rebekah, Abraham, Leah; for us, however, his words are noteworthy because there is in them a clear expression of his confident faith in an immediate meeting with the souls of his kindred. "Bury me with my fathers," he says; "my dust shall rest with theirs." But he also says, "I am to be gathered unto my people," and the historian adds, "he yielded up the ghost and was gathered unto his people." His body was not yet gathered to the bodies of his people, so if, at the moment of death, he was gathered to them it must have been in the spirit, in the Paradise of the faithful; accordingly the Epistle to the Hebrews declares of Jacob and of all those who were buried with him in the cave of Machpelah, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." In the assurance of that faith Jacob met death with perfect self-possession. "He gathered up his feet into the bed;" he consented to his departure, even as Christ upon the Cross bowed His head in token of His consent to the approach of death, and thus willingly, triumphantly, he was gathered unto his people. "How calm and noble that face looked, fixed in the marble of death! The Jacob-look had vanished from it; and it was stamped with the smile with which the royal Israel-spirit had moulded it in its outward passage."

"So, pilgrim, now thy brows are cold,
We see thee what thou art; and know
Thy likeness to the wise below,
Thy kindred to the great of old."

During the weeks of Lent we have been trying to learn from Jacob how to live; to-day we may learn from him

how to die. After "life's long Lent" the world-wearied servant of God has "entered into the quiet Easter-eve of faith." His history is especially helpful to those who find it hard to be good. From first to last his life was a fierce and fiery struggle of the flesh against the spirit, and of the spirit against the flesh. The note of joy is faint. The joylessness of his spiritual life, if somewhat magnified, is yet traced to its source in Arthur Hugh Clough's interpretation of the patriarch's last words to his sons:

" Ah me ! this eager rivalry of life,
This cruel conflict for pre-eminence,
This keen supplanting of the dearest kin,
Quick seizure and fast unrelaxing hold
Of vantage-place ; the stony, hard resolve,
The chase, the competition, and the craft
Which seems to be the poison of our life,
And yet is the condition of our life !
To have done things on which the eye with shame
Looks back, the closed hand clutching still the prize !
Alas ! What of all these things shall I say ?
Take me away unto Thy sleep, O God !
I thank Thee it is over, yet I think
It was a work appointed me of Thee.
How is it ? I have striven all my days
To do my duty to my house and hearth,
And to the purpose of my father's race,
Yet is my heart therewith not satisfied."

Yes, the secret of all Jacob's dissatisfaction and disquietude was his sin and its penalty, the punishment of disobedience which "is the other half of sin." Endowed by nature with the richest gifts of intellectual strength and firmness of purpose, he was destined to be a masterful, distinguished man. But he was also born with keen inclinations to seek self-advancement at any price, and

thus guile in its multitudinous forms became the besetting sin of his life. It was decreed that he should be the birthright heir of the promises of God, but his father's wilfulness in disregarding the oracle from on high tempted the youth to secure his own by fraud and the bartered birthright became henceforth at once the bane and the blessing of his life. When God spoke to his soul in the Ladder-vision at Bethel he was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; he vowed his vow, consecrated himself to the service of God, and all that follows is the record of his efforts to keep that vow. And the Spirit of God helped him in his struggle, by encouragement, by chastisement, and never forsook him. There can be few of us who have had to meet greater hindrances in our efforts to be true to God and to the highest ideals of mankind. But in the end he triumphed over all the foes of his soul. If we are steadfast, we also may share his victory.

They "buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah." On Easter Even our thoughts turn to another cave where "they laid Jesus." In that cavern tomb, which was also in the land of Canaan, the worn and lacerated body of the Lord reposed in peace through the long Jewish Sabbath Day. Our Saviour's body was in the cave; His soul was gathered to His people. He was with His people, all the departed, who awaited the resurrection and the final judgment. He promised to meet the penitent thief this day in Paradise. And Paradise is not Heaven, for on Easter morning He said to the Magdalene, "Touch me not! I have not yet ascended to My Father." He did not go to Heaven, the abode of the Father, until He assumed His risen body. On Easter Even, therefore, we see the meaning of the words of the Creed, "He descended into Hell," into the abode of the

departed, where all souls wait the resurrection and the judgment of the last day.

Can we doubt that on the first Easter Even Jacob saw Christ, and received the full answer to his dying prayer, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!"

Jacob's soul was in Paradise; on earth his body was being prepared for Machpelah. "And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed. . . . And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt. And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company. And they came to the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days. And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim, which is beyond Jordan. And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre." Thus the mortal remains of the Prince of God were laid to rest; "and in all probability they are there, in a state

of perfect preservation, unto this day. Many a storm has swept over them — Assyrian, Egyptian, Babylonian, Grecian, Roman, Saracenic, and Mohammedan. But nought has disturbed their quiet rest; and there " they await the second advent of the Crucified and Risen Lord. " For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds; to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

THE END.

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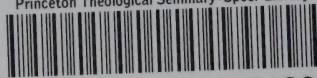
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